WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL AND THE LIBERAL NONCONFORMIST PRESS, 1886-1923

Roisin Higgins

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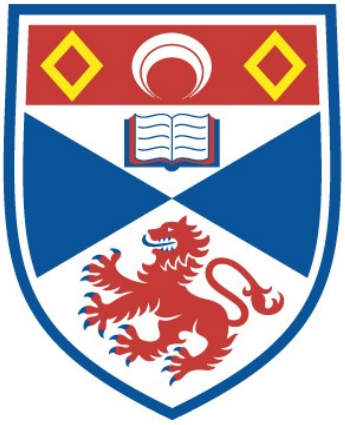

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"WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL AND THE LIBERAL NONCONFORMIST PRESS,1886-1923"

BY
ROISIN HIGGINS

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25th April 1995... .....

I was admitted as a research student in October 1989 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in October 1989; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1989 and 1995.

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Abstract

William Robertson Nicoll (1851-1923) founded the British Weekly in 1886 to exploit the need for a Liberal Nonconformist newspaper. Nicoll became the most important editor of a Free Church journal in the Edwardian period. The British Weekly provided a regular focus for political Nonconformity and Nicoll was a primary raiser of the Nonconformist consciousness and shaper of the collective conscience.

This thesis considers the role of newspapers as conduits of political thought. As distributors of information, newspapers had a definite role in setting the political agenda and this work considers the programme which Nicoll pressed at the British Weekly. The newspaper is also considered as a nexus of religious and financial considerations.

The analysis provides an examination of the British Weekly from its foundation in 1886, placing it in political context and setting down the editorial agenda. Nonconformist concerns were threatened both by the political preponderance of Irish interests and by the extension of the franchise to working class voters more concerned with social than religious equality. This thesis therefore looks at Nicoll's alignment with the Liberal Imperialists because they would rid the party of its commitment to Home Rule and (less importantly) because they appeared to respond to the needs of the working class. In 1902 the British Weekly misplaced its national efficiency

agenda and became prominent in the Passive Resistance campaign against the Education Act. The thesis examines the way in which the protest was used to energise political Nonconformity. The campaign brought Nicoll into contact with Lloyd George and this work explores the mutual benefits of this relationship and also the way in which Nicoll was compromised as a lobbyist by the association.

This is the first comprehensive examination of the political nature of the British Weekly. It highlights the increasing complexity of reconciling religion and politics in the twentieth century as pressing social issues could not be repaired by Victorian moral crusades.

INTRODUCTION

Benedict Anderson describes the reading of newspapers as an "extraordinary mass ceremony". He illustrates the way in which print provides the substance of imaginings which create the sense of a shared consciousness fundamental to the concept of nation.[1] Newspapers also function in the formation of minority "communities" within the nation. For religious groups the "simultaneous consumption" of newspapers provides a system of information which multiplies the experience of public worship and gives meaning to the idea of a national religious tradition. Formalised religious groups have a strong oral culture but they are dependent upon print to give them a cohesion across a wide geographical area.

This thesis will examine the role of the Free Church editor Robertson Nicoll in the weekly creation of the idea of "British Nonconformity". It will consider the function of newspapers as raisers of consciousness and more specifically the function of the British Weekly as creator of conscience. The thesis will also explore the world created through the filter of the British Weekly, a newspaper which provides a comprehensive chronicle of the issues which preoccupied the Free Churches, and chart the political development of the British Weekly from its inception in 1886 until Nicoll's death in 1923. The newspaper will be examined as a nexus of religious, political and economic factors. This work considers how these elements influence the direction of the British

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[1] B.Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, (revised edition) London 1992, p.35.

British Weekly and whether they can be reconciled without the loss of editorial integrity.

Despite the significance of Nicoll and the British Weekly to the Nonconformist mind at the turn of the century there has been very little comprehensive research on the subject. T.H. Darlow wrote an official biography of Nicoll in 1925. This is an invaluable source of the editor's correspondence.[2] In 1954 G.W. Lawrence wrote a doctoral thesis on Nicoll and religious journalism in the nineteenth century. This is a widespread if uncritical survey of Nicoll's career but its main focus is on religious rather than political subjects.[3] Stephen Koss is the only other historian who has consulted the Nicoll archive in Lumsden, Aberdeenshire (correspondence between Nicoll and Lloyd George is in the National Library of Scotland). He provides many insightful comments on Nicoll in his survey histories of political Nonconformity and the political press.[4] However this thesis is the first systematic examination of Nicoll and the politics of the British Weekly. It provides the opportunity to put into historical context extracts plucked from the newspaper in an attempt to represent the Free Church viewpoint. J.E.B. Munson's

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[2] T.H.Darlow, William Robertson Nicoll: Life and Letters, London 1925. Many of the letters included in this volume can no longer be found at the Old Manse in Lumsden where the majority of Nicoll's correspondence is kept.

[3] G.W.Lawrence, "William Robertson Nicoll (1851-1923) and Religious Journalism in the Nineteenth Century." Unpublished Ph.D, University of Edinburgh, 1954.

[4] S.Koss, Nonconformity in Modern British Politics, London, 1975 and The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, (paperback edition) London 1990.

exhaustive study of Nonconformity as revealed through the passive resistance movement against the 1902 Education Act judges Nicoll imperfectly because the research is concentrated on the British Weekly in the Edwardian period.[5] This thesis will help to redress this type of imbalance.

As an editor Nicoll was self-consciously a raiser of consciousness. Stephen Koss has said of him and John Clifford (who also died in 1923) that they "believed passionately in the destiny of political Nonconformity, which they sometimes seemed almost to have willed into existence".[6] This was exactly the purpose which the British Weekly served. The perpetuation of the view that Dissenters were defined by a different spiritual and cultural experience was important because it reinforced the sense of oneness within the disparate Free Church community and because it gave an impression of internal strength to those outside. The British Weekly, by its very nature, assisted this idea of separateness, and it used this sense of alienation to promote its own political agenda which was the struggle for religious equality. The British Weekly did not want Nonconformists to assimilate until this had been achieved.

Without newspapers there could have been no concept of a "Nonconformist conscience" - indeed it was the editor of the Methodist Times who coined the phrase. Church leaders,

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[5] J.E.B.Munson, "A Study of Nonconformity in Edwardian England as Revealed by the Passive Resistance Movement Against the 1902 Education Act." Unpublished D.Phil. Oxford 1973.

[6] Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.166.

the National Free Church Council and Dissenting M.P.s all relied on the press to advertise their views nationally and invent the notion of a cohesive moral or political force. As the most important Free Church journal of the Edwardian period the British Weekly became the main expresser of this conscience.

Paradoxically, the British Weekly was a hybrid born of political Nonconformity at its most confident and of the growing awareness that religion as a political force was declining. Nicoll's immediate purpose was to keep the debate alive while religious inequality continued to exist and in the longer term to ensure that Christianity remained vital to British national life. The British Weekly provided a platform for the agony of the Churches and the Liberal party as they sought to make themselves relevant to modern democracy without losing their essence. Both had to find a language which would be meaningful to the working classes without excluding their natural following. The British Weekly was aimed at a middle-class readership and therefore reflects its nervousness at the potential shift of power to the masses.[7] Although newspapers were vital to the existence of political Nonconformity, so too was the presence of a Free Church electorate which was prepared to use its vote to lobby certain causes. The extension of the franchise to a less religious working class considerably diluted the political power of the Free Churches and forced their sectarian interests down the political agenda. This

[7] It is very apparent from readers' letters, competitions and columns on etiquette that the British Weekly was aimed at and attracted a middle class audience.

analysis therefore takes into account the British Weekly's interest in the development of the Labour movement and the implications of Socialism for the Liberal party's claim to be the nation's main progressive force.

Newspapers are not simply narrative ephemerae. Editorial policy is directed by many practical social and economic factors. The elements which contributed to the overall character of the British Weekly are examined in this introduction together with the unique input of its editor. Nicoll provided the personality of the newspaper. His good friend J.M. Barrie wrote: "Seldom, I suppose, has there been an editor who was his paper so peculiarly as Nicoll was. He made the British Weekly off his own bat - made it by himself out of himself; it was so full of his personality that he came stalking out of all the pages..."[8] Nicoll's assistant editor Jane Stoddart has recorded that the lowest number of leaders written by Nicoll in any year was 41.[9] Consequently he was less an editorial spectre than a physical presence whose contributions defined the newspaper. As its founding editor and proprietor it was Nicoll who established the British Weekly as the main reference point of the Free Church mind after 1902, less than twenty years after the first issue. In this year the publishers Hodder and Stoughton recognised the "great value" of Nicoll's contributions which had "very largely brought...about" the

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[8] Darlow, op.cit., p.326.

[9] J.T.Stoddart, William Robertson Nicoll LLD: Editor and Preacher, London 1903, p.41.

success of the newspaper and offered him an increased salary of £700 plus a fourth share of the profits.[10] In 1903 Nicoll reminded Hodder and Stoughton during a dispute over the production of the British Weekly: "I have written more of my paper than any editor in London. More and more as the years went on..."[11] In the minds of contemporaries Nicoll and the British Weekly were inter-changeable.

Nicoll was born in Aberdeenshire in 1851 and was raised in a Free Church manse. He graduated from Aberdeen University at the age of 19 and was licensed to preach at 21. He was prevented from pursuing this vocation by a weakness in his lungs which necessitated a move to London where journalism provided a surrogate pulpit. He was appointed editor of the religious journal the Expositor in 1884 (a year before he gave up his ministry) by the publishers Hodder and Stoughton. Two years later Nicoll helped to found the British Weekly and was instrumental in the setting up of the Bookman (1891), Woman at Home (1893), the Christian Budget (1898) and the British Monthly (1900).[12]

Nicoll was also a recognised literary editor. He acted as a literary adviser to Hodder and Stoughton from

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[10] Hodder and Stoughton to Nicoll, 13th February 1902, Hodder and Stoughton Papers, Guildhall Library, MS.16,372.

[11] Nicoll to Hodder-Williams, 29th November 1903, Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,370.

[12] The Expositor ceased publication in 1910; the British Weekly was sold to the Christian World in 1946; the Bookman was sold to London Mercury in 1935; Woman at Home stopped publishing in 1909; the Christian Budget lasted only until 1902 when it was sold to the Christian Herald and the British Monthly was closed in 1905. Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,355.

1886 and was linked to the founding of the Kailyard school of Scottish writing. His passion for literature gave him a breadth of vision which freed him somewhat from a very narrow Nonconformist viewpoint. This was amply illustrated in 1916 when Nicoll joined a host of Radical writers in an attempt to save Roger Casement from execution.[13] In H.G. Wells' Boon Nicoll is parodied as the "eminent litterateur" Dr. Tomlinson Keyhole who is murdered "in his villa at Hampstead". Keyhole writes four reviews of the same work under different names (a common practice of Nicoll's) and reveals an appetite for scandal:

> Dr. Keyhole distinguished himself by the feverish eagerness of his curiosity about where Leslie slept and where was the boudoir of Mrs. Sinclair. He insists that a very sad and painful scandal about these two underlies the *New Republic*, and professes a thirsty desire to draw a veil over it as conspicuously as possible.[14]

Nicoll had many critics. In his obituary the Times noted that "His personality was held in awe even when he was not always beloved".[15] A.G. Gardiner recorded hearing Nicoll speak on literary criticism and thought him "as false & sleek as ever" although undeniably "very clever".[16] Lloyd George opined that "Nicoll had enemies, due in a great measure to the fact that he was thorough.

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[13] S.Koss, Fleet Street Radical: A.G.Gardiner and the "Daily News", London 1973, p.196.

[14] H.G.Wells, Boon, London 1915, p.79. Nicoll was known as Keyhole behind his back in the Reform Club. Koss, Nonconformity Politics, p.41.

[15] Times, 5th May 1923.

[16] 28th January 1910, Gardiner's Diary, Gardiner Papers, In Koss, Fleet Street Radical, p.173.

When he went into the war, he went into it heart and soul..."[17] While there was some truth in this assertion, criticism more often came because Nicoll appeared to be incredibly calculating and his journalistic style was very abrasive. George Riddell wrote that as "a controversialist he [Nicoll] was in the first rank. No writer of his time had a greater power of marshalling arguments in an arresting and convincing form...He excelled with all the weapons of controversy - persuasion, invective, satire and humour".[18] The power which Nicoll enjoyed undoubtedly exposed him to many detractors.

The British Weekly was also the product of the work of a wider team. Jane Stoddart was a versatile assistant editor who spoke French and German and revealed a great breadth of reading in her journalism. She first met Nicoll when he took up his ministry in Kelso where she lived. Stoddart moved to London in 1887 to help Nicoll edit a planned series of homiletic volumes and joined the staff of the British Weekly in 1890.[19] Ernest Hodder-Williams, grandson of the publisher, became an important contributor and along with Stoddart edited the British Weekly in the last years of Nicoll's life (although Nicoll remained nominal editor). Principal James Denney was also a significant contributor and in 1906 agreed to relieve Nicoll - probably with a leader article - at least once a

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[17] 6th May 1923, Riddell Diaries, British Library, Add.MS.62990, ff.53-54.

[18] British Weekly, 10th May 1923.

[19] J.T.Stoddart, My Harvest Years, London 1938, p.18, p.57, p.65.

month.[20] Denney, who was born in Paisley, was appointed Professor of the Free Church College in Glasgow in 1897 and Principal of Glasgow College in 1915.[21]

Hodder and Stoughton provided the financial support for Nicoll's journalistic ventures and (according to Darlow) did not trouble Nicoll about the expense of the British Weekly, encouraging the editor in every way possible.[22] However correspondence suggests that the publishers were very dependent upon Nicoll to generate ideas. When Nicoll wanted to introduce illustrations to the British Weekly supplement he was prepared to pay for the cost personally.[23] In 1901 changes to the method of printing the British Weekly - to a new rotary printing machine[24] - were a constant source of tension between Nicoll and the publishers. The editor threatened to refrain from writing anything for the journal if its production and distribution were not put on a more reliable basis.[25] Nicoll appeared to feel that the contribution of the publishers to the finished product was negligible. He complained to Ernest Hodder-Williams about the response of

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[20] Denney to Nicoll, 2nd October 1906, W.R.Nicoll (edit.), Letters of Principal James Denney to William Robertson Nicoll 1893-1914, London 1920, p.74.

[21] W.R.Nicoll (edit.), Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.xiii, pp.xvii-iii, pp.xxii-iii.

[22] Darlow, op.cit., p.74.

[23] Nicoll to Hodder and Stoughton, n.d., Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,355.

[24] British Weekly, 12th December 1901.

[25] Nicoll to Hodder-Williams, 29th November 1903, Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,370.

Hodder and Stoughton to a particular idea:

> I do not think either of them in the least understood my real idea, and they did not put a single question or make a single remark. It is very disheartening to do business with people of that kind, but I suppose there is no help for it, although I have been thinking very seriously whether in your interest and in mine it would not be well to leave them without any proposals for one year, and just see how they would get on. I need not say that they have not a single idea themselves of doing anything nor do they appear to be in the slightest degree disturbed but rather complacent.[26]

This dearth of intellectual input from the publishers allowed Nicoll a free hand while the British Weekly continued to make a profit. This it did almost immediately; by the end of 1886 it was already clearing its expense.[27] In 1901 Nicoll reproached Hodder-Williams from Paris for announcing that the circulation of the British Weekly was 68,000 arguing that it was unprecedented to make this kind of statement unless the circulation was remarkably large (as that of the Daily Mail), and it was even more unprecedented to announce it as less than it was: Nicoll's estimate was 70,000-72,000.[28] This forces us to treat with caution the British Weekly's public estimate of its own circulation which it gauged to be 80,000 at the end of 1901, having increased from 54,071 in 1899, 62,419 in 1900 and 73,859 in November 1901.[29]

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[26] Nicoll to Hodder-Williams, 31st January n.d. [1900-01], Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,370.

[27] Darlow, op.cit.,'p.74.

[28] Nicoll to Hodder-Williams, n.d., [1900s], Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,370.

[29] British Weekly, 12th December 1901.

Before launching the British Weekly Nicoll wrote "We must have 20,000 subscribers [to survive], and there is not that number of intelligent people in the country - so we must condescend to weak minds".[30] Nicoll took advantage of new trends in typography and journalistic content pioneered by W.T. Stead at the Pall Mall Gazette. Matthew Arnold is attributed with coining this departure "new journalism". He believed that it had "much to recommend it; it is full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one great fault is that it is *feather-brained*".[31] Arnold's critique was inspired by an article in the Nineteenth Century by Stead in which he posited the view that sensational journalism was "solely a means to an end...never an end in itself. When it ceases to serve its turn, it must be exchanged for some other and more effective mood [sic] of rousing the sluggish mind of the general public into at least a momentary activity".[32] Although the British Weekly did not use the infamous methods of the Pall Mall Gazette to capture the national imagination, it did employ innovative devices like the London religious census of its first issue and the popular "Tempted London" series which outlined the various vices

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[30] Nicoll to Marcus Dods, 7th August 1886, Darlow, op.cit., p.70. Dods was a frequent correspondent of Nicoll. He was Minister of Renfield Free Church in Glasgow from 1864 to 1889 when he became Professor of New Testament criticism and Exegesis at New College, Edinburgh, until his death in 1909.

[31] M.Arnold, "Up to Easter," Nineteenth Century, 1887, xxi, pp.638-9, in A.Lee, The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914, (reprint) London 1980, p.118.

[32] W.T.Stead, "Government by Journalism," Contemporary Review, Vol.49, May 1886, p.672.

waiting for young men and women in the capital.[33] It must never be forgotten that the British Weekly was a commercial enterprise. No matter how important its political agenda it still had to sustain itself as a viable business.

In his article in the Nineteenth Century Stead described newspapers as the ultimate democratic expression, "the most immediate and most unmistakable exponents of the national mind".[34] This was part of the broader notion that the repeal of the "taxes on knowledge" in 1855 had ushered in a period of press freedom; newspapers were no longer dependent upon political party funding and were sustained through advertising. However this market based system made it increasingly difficult for truly Radical newspapers to sustain their economic base. Advertisers became important arbiters of the politics of the press as the political slant of newspapers was assumed to indicate the social class of the readership. It did not make financial sense to advertise in journals purchased by people with low incomes.[35] Contemporaries were not oblivious to the narrowing affect of advertisers on political debate. Hall Caine wrote in the British Weekly

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[33] "Tempted London: Young Men" began on 7th October 1887, and the "Young Women" series began on 27th April 1888.

[34] W.T.Stead, op.cit., p.653.

[35] J.Curran and J.Seaton, Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain, London 1981, *passim*. J.Goodbody has concluded that although the Radical Star matched the circulation figures of its main rival, advertisers assumed that while the early editions were bought by the lower middle-classes added circulation came from those who were less well off. "The Star: Its Role in the Rise of Popular Newspapers, 1888-1914," Journal of Newspaper and Periodical History, Vol.1, No.2, Spring 1985, p.23.

in 1901:

> Our newspapers are bigger and better than the newspapers of other countries but they live on their trade adverts - in other words they live on the capitalists. They are free from political censorship, but less free than newspapers abroad from class control. The English press is the reverse of a corrupt press, but it would be folly to pretend that it is an independent press. Its interest always lies on the side of the existing order, and it cannot be expected to play the part of a pioneer in a social and economic change.[36]

Stead outlined the three areas in which the press played out its role: accessible representative of the public; guardian of the general interest and Chamber of Initiative. It was the acceptance of the first of these which gave newspapers their mandate to act as watchdog for the nation and their political strength to act as a initiators of policy. Although access to the medium was not universal and advertising was an increasingly restrictive type of capital it was vital for the success of a newspaper that it was seen to be representative.

The British Weekly had to create the image that it spoke for Nonconformity. The fact that its circulation was substantial suggests that readers recognised its depiction of Free Church culture and accepted its role in the sharing of their common beliefs. Nicoll's parliamentary influence was dependent upon the notion that those who bought the British Weekly subscribed to its political viewpoint and that Nicoll had the ability to generate thought in his readership. However political comment made up no more than 20% of the British Weekly, 70% of the content dealt with

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[36] British Weekly, 12th December 1901.

religious issues. It is as likely that this type of journal was purchased as much for its religious and literary articles - for its value as a magazine - as for its political polemics. There is not necessarily a correlation between the influence the British Weekly was perceived to have over its readership and the reality.

Politicians allowed themselves to be influenced by the press because they were prey to this journalistic propaganda which portrayed newspapers as the great educators and representatives of the people. More importantly the press was seen to be a means of politicising the growing number of novitiate electors. No one could evaluate the extent to which newspapers influenced the politics of their readers. However, evidence suggests that they are instruments which confirm rather than convert political opinion. It was observed in 1902:

> If the voter does not take his party politics from the paper, it confirms him in his party preferences or prejudices, and by an action analogous to that of water dripping on a stone, keeps him loyal to the party; in any event the newspapers provided the parties and their organisations with a highly effective means of publicity.[37]

This perceived influence allowed newspapers to be most constructive in the setting of the political agenda. This thesis is concerned with the agenda which was set by Nicoll and the British Weekly. It presents the newspaper as a conduit of political and social opinion and attempts to

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[37] Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties, London 1902, p.410, in Lee, op.cit., p.187.

gauge the impact of the British Weekly on the parliamentary process. It does not claim to be able to assess the actual impact of the newspaper on its readership other than how this is refracted through the vision of the British Weekly itself and the private correspondence of journalists and politicians.

The main source for this thesis is the British Weekly which has been systematically consulted. Although it was not the only journal Nicoll edited, it was the most important and the only one with which he was connected throughout his journalistic life. I have also had access to Nicoll's private letters which remain in Aberdeenshire. Where possible I have examined the archives of those connected with the British Weekly but it has not been possible to locate any surviving letters pertaining to Jane Stoddart.

This thesis opens with an examination of the founding of the British Weekly, placing it in political context and setting down its editorial agenda. It shows that the British Weekly had a specific sectarian aim: the presentation of the case for Nonconformist Liberals who wanted to create a space within the Gladstonian liberal programme for disestablishment and nondenominational education, and who were not preoccupied with the debate over Irish Home Rule. The British Weekly's loyalty to the official Liberal party in 1886 did not signify a commitment to Gladstone, rather it began life as a Chamberlainite.

Chamberlain's move to the Unionists forced his erstwhile supporters to compensate for this loss to the

Liberal party and the second chapter of the thesis looks at nature of this process. The British Weekly sought a modern Liberal agenda which would nonetheless be friendly to religious politics. The chapter examines the shift in traditional Evangelical thinking and in the Liberal party which provided the language for greater governmental intervention and looks at the British Weekly's response to this and its movement towards the Roseberian section of the party. Finally it shows that Nicoll's support for Liberal Imperialism was as much a rejection of Gladstonianism with its Home Rule agenda and anti-disestablishment basis as it was a positive embracing of national efficiency.

The third chapter concentrates solely on the debate over education. This issue was of fundamental importance to the Free Churches because it represented the first base of the power of the Established Church. It also receives prominence in this thesis because the controversy over the 1902 Education Act established Nicoll as a leading voice of the Free Churches and propelled him into a political role. This chapter looks at the way in which the British Weekly interpreted the Nonconformist conscience and how it used the issue of education to energise the Dissenting tradition. It indicates that Nicoll did not simply use the Education Act to bolster support for the Liberal party but was primarily concerned with its implications for the future of the Free Churches. Therefore the passive resistance movement against the education rate did not represent the exploitation of the Nonconformist conscience but was an extension of Free Church culture in which

sacrifice was used to heighten religious conviction.

Chapters 4 and 5 will deal with political Nonconformity within the framework of the Liberal Governments of 1906 to 1914. The British Weekly was at its strongest as a protest newspaper and these chapters will consider its position once its main political champions had achieved power. Balfour's Education Act brought together the political interests of Nicoll and David Lloyd George and these chapters examine this relationship and consider its mutual benefit. The obstructive behaviour of the House of Lords after 1906 helped Lloyd George to convince Nicoll that the Second Chamber was the real battleground for religious equality. Lloyd George recruited Nicoll as a publicist for official Liberal party policy and in return Nicoll expected Free Church interests to be given priority. This was the beginning of a process of change for the British Weekly as it became involved with the political future of Lloyd George and was instrumental in selling the Peoples' Budget and the Land Campaign to its middle class readership.

Chapter 6 will be a study of the major concerns of the British Weekly during the First World War. Initially opposed to British intervention, Nicoll became a fervent convert to the rightness of the war. He was an important proselytizer and helped to rally the Free Churches behind the Government. Nicoll came into conflict with Lloyd George over the handling of the drink traffic and amendments to the Welsh Disestablishment Bill, confirming his independent Free Church voice. However this thesis

suggests that the way in which Free Church leaders like Nicoll interpreted the Nonconformist conscience during the war had long term damaging repercussions. For the first time, duty to the State was placed above the integrity of individual conscience in Free Church criticism of conscientious objectors.

The final chapter of the thesis looks briefly at the years following the war in which Nicoll's infirmity forced him to make fewer journalistic contributions. It considers the British Weekly's position on the process of post-war reconstruction and looks at the implications for Nonconformity and Liberalism.

CHAPTER ONE

"A JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND CHRISTIAN PROGRESS"

The British Weekly was launched into a gap created by the decamping of the Christian World to Liberal Unionism. Its avowed creed was one of "progress" and - while independent of any sect or party - "Advanced Liberalism".[1] Nicoll's more specific agenda was to consolidate the position of Nonconformists within the reduced Liberal party in the hope of pressing a sectarian programme. The British Weekly supported the Gladstonian Liberal party even though its editor was a self-confessed Chamberlainite. Indeed in the newspaper's opening months Nicoll commissioned two important unsigned leaders on Ireland from Henry Drummond which gave the impression that the British Weekly was sympathetic to Home Rule for the island. This chapter looks at the political background of the British Weekly and shows that Nicoll stayed with the official party because it was the traditional home of Nonconformists and because he had miscalculated the longevity of Gladstone's political life. It examines Nicoll's position once Chamberlain's self-banishment to the Unionists became permanent and the British Weekly's subsequent anger at the Irish Nationalists and Gladstone as they obstructed Nicoll's own agenda: disestablishment and disendowment of the Church and equal right of access in schools.

It was disestablishment of the Irish Church which encouraged Nonconformists to look to Gladstone as a supporter of religious equality.[2] This precedent allowed

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[1] British Weekly, 5th November 1886.

[2] Guinness Rogers recorded that, "it was probably Mr. Gladstone's action in this [Irish Disestablishment] which first raised him to the position he never afterwards lost in

the British Weekly to exalt Gladstone as the leader of the battle despite the fact that he more often seemed its greatest obstacle.[3] However for Gladstone the real significance of the legislation was in part that it incorporated principles which might protect the Church of England and English religious education from Parliamentary interference.[4] The Midlothian campaign had again significantly strengthened Gladstone's relationship with the Nonconformist community, which understood the unequivocal nature of his reaction to Beaconsfieldism.[5] Faith in the integrity of the Liberal leader tied many Dissenters to Gladstone's coat tails and pre-empted the consolidation of Chamberlain's leadership of this group and its possible independence.[6]

The Bulgarian agitation erupted at the time when Dale and Guinness Rogers were completing their disestablishment

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Nonconformist affection and esteem." J.Guinness Rogers, An Autobiography, London 1903, p.204.

[3] British Weekly, 23rd December 1887. The British Weekly restated this in 1890 when it argued that Nonconformists had stayed with Gladstone because of his achievements, genius, religious conviction, and because he had *practically* served them when he passed Irish Disestablishment. British Weekly, 30th October 1890. Gladstone did also make periodic hints that he had "crossed the Rubicon" and this helped to maintain Nonconformist support, eg. British Weekly, 21st June 1889.

[4] J.P.Parry, Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867-1875, Cambridge 1986, p.177.

[5] The eventual decline of Evangelicalism in the Free Churches in the last two decades of the nineteenth century meant that Gladstone's adamant, moral politics would soon be adrift from contemporary religious understanding. B.Hilton, "Gladstone's Theological Politics" in High and Low Politics in Modern Britain: Ten Studies, edit. M.Bentley and J.Stevenson, Oxford, 1983, p.53.

[6] Kitson Clark, Introduction to Shannon, Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876, London 1963, p.xxviii.

campaign, and they had anticipated that the issue of religious equality would gain some prominence.[7] The radical campaign in Scotland was so strongly committed to land reform and disestablishment that the Liberal leadership feared it would divide the party.[8] But in 1879 Gladstone wrote to the voluntary campaigner Principal Rainy that "in the present condition of imperial affairs" he could not profess that disestablishment occupied "the first, or nearly the first, place in my mind".[9] Nevertheless Nonconformist support remained such that Gladstone was in a position to commend Free Church patriotism at the General Election one year later.[10]

Having relied upon the cooperation of various interest groups to obtain power the Liberal Government found itself again besieged by calls for disestablishment, temperance and social purity legislation.[11] The 1880s saw a resurgence of Scottish assertiveness which expressed itself in part through demands for disestablishment and in the formation of Land Leagues.[12] Concentration on the extension of the suffrage and redistribution of seats

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[7] Guinness Rogers, op.cit, p.214.

[8] J.G.Kellas, "The Liberal Party in Scotland 1876-1895," The Scottish Historical Review Volume XLIV No.137, April 1965, p.3.

[9] Gladstone to Rainy, 24th May 1879, in P.C.Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, Volume II, London, 1909.

[10] D.A. Hamer, The Politics of Electoral Pressure, Hassocks, 1977, p.21.

[11] D.A.Hamer, Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: A Study in Leadership and Policy, Oxford, 1972, p.89.

[12] Kellas, op.cit., p.5.

temporarily united the party but the anticipation of a more democratic system led many sectional groups to believe that their position would be enhanced once reform had been secured.[13] In September 1885 the radical National Liberal Federation of Scotland was formed to counter the more Whiggish Scottish Liberal Association. Unlike its Chamberlainite English counterpart the Scottish Federation had as a main plank the call for religious equality.[14] The threat of radical and moderate Liberals standing against each other became serious enough for Gladstone to intervene with an open letter appealing for the end of double candidatures.[15] The Prime Minister also saw fit to quash debate on disestablishment in Scotland by placing it firmly "at the end of a long vista".[16] In England Chamberlain continued to campaign for a broad programme of radical reform and began to suppose that democratic radicalism could survive without Gladstone and his more moderate supporters. It was within this context that Gladstone presented his Home Rule proposals.[17]

The subsequent schism grew out of the battle to secure

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[13] Supporters of disestablishment certainly believed that the negation of Whig power through the single-member constituency, the extension of the county franchise and the redistribution of seats would help their cause. G.I.T.Machin, Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921, Oxford, 1987, pp.147-8.

[14] Kellas, op.cit., pp.6-7.

[15] Scotsman, 26th November 1885, in D.C.Savage, "Scottish Politics, 1885-6," Scottish Historical Review, Volume 40, 1961, p.127.

[16] Scotsman, 12 November 1885, in Kellas, op.cit., p.8.

[17] Hamer, Gladstone and Rosebery, pp.100-1, p.110.

the initiative within the Liberal party. Hamer supports the view that Gladstone's concentration on a single issue was designed to suppress the fragmentation of the party in the hands of sectional interests. Electoral reform brought with it a change in the relationship between Liberals and extra-parliamentary pressure groups. Groups like the Liberation Society, the United Kingdom Alliance and the National Education League - despite the rift in the 1870s - were more closely associated with the Liberals than the Conservative party. Interest groups contributed energy and moral certainty to the party but they also provided a target for those who depicted the Liberals as puppets of faddists.[18] However it can be argued that Chamberlain's progressive agenda had already run out of steam by the 1885 general election.[19] Gladstone was determined to keep Ireland within the Empire and only adopted Home Rule once it was clear that the Conservatives would not use their influence to push it through the House of Lords.

In the autumn of 1885 the course of the British Liberal party was directed by two misconceived notions: that Gladstone's retirement was imminent and that Liberals would win handsomely at the next election. Despite tensions, neither the Whig nor Radical sections of the party wanted to break with Gladstone. Hartington and his followers aimed to present themselves as the heirs of

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[18] D.A.Hamer, Electoral Pressure, p.viii, pp.2-3.

[19] T.A.Jenkins, Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party, 1874-1886, Oxford, 1988, pp.204-5, p.285.

orthodox Liberalism once Gladstone had retired[20] and although Gladstone's election manifesto represented a "slap in the face" to Radicals, Chamberlain judged, "his [Gladstone's] reign cannot possibly be a long one and it is undesirable to have even the remains of his great influence cast against us".[21]

In anticipation of a convincing victory in the election Gladstone hoped to be given time to convince his party of the merits of Home Rule before introducing legislation. Hartington had accepted Gladstone's leadership with the understanding that Ireland would remain an open question and with the possibility that Gladstone would retire before submitting specific proposals.[22] Chamberlain expected a Liberal victory at the polls to provide his mandate for Radical reform. The party's failure to gain an overall majority scuppered all of these projections.

The internal politicking of the Liberal party had a dramatic effect on the party's traditional supporters in the press. Alan Lee saw the debate over Home Rule as the manifestation of much more complicated and long ranging grievances; "In the press, as in Liberalism generally, Home Rule probably served as an indicator of pre-existent political affiliations and attitudes, rather than as an

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[20] T.A.Jenkins, Gladstone, Whiggery, p.218.

[21] Chamberlain to Collings, 22nd September 1885, JCPP, in R.Jay, Joseph Chamberlain : A Political Study, Oxford, 1981, p.115.

[22] Jenkins, Gladstone, Whiggery, p.246, p.256, pp.274-6.

originator of them".[23] Stephen Koss preferred a less fatalistic approach and instead saw the upset which Home Rule caused in the press - if not the Liberal party - as a much more spontaneous reaction to an unacceptable policy. He argued that although it would be folly to view the Home Rule split in isolation, "the weight of newspaper opinion...abruptly shifted" in 1886 and 1887. The fact that the Unionists had overthrown the numerical superiority which the Liberal press had maintained since the abolition of the "taxes on knowledge" suggested to Koss that Home Rule itself was of paramount importance in the division.[24] Certainly in the Parliamentary sphere there was nothing inevitable about the split or the sides which were taken.[25]

The general decrease in Liberal influence in the press was in part due to financial considerations. This was more true of the Radical newspapers whose editors came under increasing pressure to tone down more extreme views.[26] Sir Edward Hamilton confided to his diary in January 1888, "Several of the best Provincial papers have gone over wholly or in part [to the Unionists]; and others are at their wits' end for want of funds". This was primarily due to "the desertion of the bulk of the wealthy classes from the advanced liberal camp".[27]

In the first years of the Liberal split, the loss of

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[23] Lee, op.cit., p.161.

[24] Koss, Political Press, p.287.

[25] Jenkins, Gladstone, Whiggery, p.291.

[26] Lee, op.cit., p.159.

[27] Koss, Political Press, p.306.

support for the party among the London press was greater than in other regions. The party was forced to rely on the Pall Mall Gazette for its metropolitan support as the Daily Chronicle had Unionist tendencies and the Daily News was a somewhat confused voice of Liberal party policy. Against this the Times had become anti-Home Rule along with the Spectator, the Observer and the Christian World. Among the English regional press the level of dissent was somewhat less dramatic. The Leeds Mercury and the Manchester Guardian continued support of Home Rule.[28] Many areas maintained their Gladstonian press at least until the 1890s.[29]

Scottish newspapers were much less predictable. The Scotsman, the Glasgow Herald and the Aberdeen Free Press joined an anti-Gladstonian bandwagon, leaving the Dundee Advertiser as the only substantial Liberal newspaper in a predominantly Liberal country.[30] A possible rift with the right wing of the Liberal party in Scotland had been averted in 1885 by Gladstone's declaration on disestablishment. However this temporary accommodation could not overcome the Home Rule Bill of the following year.[31] In 1884 the Scotsman's editor, Charles Cooper, had written warning Rosebery against a close association with the government:

I have never had much confidence in Mr.

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[28] Koss, Political Press, p.281.

[29] Lee, op.cit., p.161.

[30] Koss, Political Press, p.289.

[31] Savage, op.cit., p.129.

> Gladstone. If I had more I should have been disgusted with him because of certain matters with which you are fully acquainted. But it seems to me that further than this, he has got the party into serious discredit, and is getting it into more. He has disgusted me and I suppose many more like me by his open and disgraceful bid for the Parnellite vote in regard to the Franchise Bill...I had hoped that Lord Hartington would have had the courage of his convictions - if he had any - and would have stood out against much that has been done. I have been mistaken...[32]

Until its severance with Gladstone in April 1886, the Scotsman was used to gather force behind the Liberal leader despite its editor's private anxieties. It argued that - having given the Irish an extended franchise in an attempt to find out what they wanted - it would be wholesale hypocrisy to ignore the message of the last election in which out of a possible 103 seats the Home Rulers gained 85. "Of course, if she [Ireland] asked for separation," it qualified, "the necessity of self preservation would override all other considerations and her demand would be refused". Three months before the Home Rule Bill was outlined the Scotsman opined, "the man is not living who has done so much as Mr. Gladstone to make the Empire strong, prosperous and contented".[33]

However when the Scotsman published the details of the Home Rule Bill[34], the reality of Gladstone's intentions

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[32] Cooper to Rosebery, 13th March 1884, Rosebery Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS 10011, f.1.

[33] Scotsman, 25th December 1885.

[34] The Irish Parliament was to have a degree of independence with the London Government maintaining control over the imperial, fiscal and foreign affairs.

- which Cooper felt repealed the Act of Union - alongside public opinion, convinced Cooper that Liberal Unionism was his only possible course. He explained to Rosebery:

> If a plan approaching Repeal were adopted I think you may count on most of Scotland going against Mr.G. Of course this does not mean that there is to be no Home Rule. Let us have a measure which Scotland would also be willing to accept for herself and the people will go for it, no matter what may be said in London.[35]

Cooper had been an advocate of Home Rule for Scotland as well as Ireland. However for him the crux lay in "the difference between a co-ordinate and a subordinate Parliament in Dublin".[36]

In the more general experience Koss suggested there was, "reason to suspect that several of the newspapers...were responding more to popular taste than to conviction".[37] But in Edinburgh and Glasgow the fact that the prevailing mood favoured Gladstone did not prevent the conversion of the major dailies and in Manchester a substantial injection of money was administered to the Manchester Weekly Times and the daily Examiner by Liberal Unionists, making little impression on the sales of the dominant Manchester Guardian.[38]

In the traditionally loyal Nonconformist press the

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[35] Cooper to Rosebery, 4th April 1886, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS 10011, f.156.

[36] Cooper to Rosebery, 24th May 1887, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS 10011, f.180.

[37] Koss, Political Press, p.287.

[38] Koss, Political Press, p.290.

Christian World which had the largest circulation, had reportedly lost "some thousands of readers" through its opposition to Home Rule.[39] This suggested the existence of a stubbornly Liberal readership which might provide the base for a Nonconformist journal for "Christian Radicals". It was into this opening that the British Weekly emerged.

i. The Founding of the "British Weekly":

In the autumn of 1886 the publishers Hodder and Stoughton had made an unsuccessful attempt to take over the ownership of the struggling British Quarterly Review (which they published); its sales having fallen from 2,500 to 500.[40] The previous May Hodder had informed Nicoll that the newspaper was in fact dead. In its place the publisher proposed a Monthly Review with Nicoll - who edited the theological journal the Expositor for Hodder and Stoughton - as editor. From the outset Nicoll was determined to assert his editorial rights. He refused to accept suggestions from the British Quarterly trustees knowing "that suggestions are commands and I would have to put in articles by men whose names are a sentence of death in themselves to my periodical. There might be no control except the power of dismissal".[41] Ultimately Nicoll

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[39] Darlow, op.cit., p.58, Koss, Political Press, p.289.

[40] Lawrence, "William Robertson Nicoll", p.78.

[41] Nicoll to Dods, 16th June 1886, Nicoll had written to Dods the previous week, "The only difficulty is the capital about £5 000. It cd be raised at once with a company but I

disliked the idea of a monthly, arguing the impossibility of running a successful Nonconformist Contemporary Review. He proposed instead a weekly paper, "I have thought it out thoroughly and wd stake anything on its success," he wrote to Marcus Dods.[42] In the end the Congregational owners of the British Quarterly refused to associate themselves with a successor, not wanting it to become a more general Nonconformist vehicle, but Nicoll and his publishers had already moved beyond their original proposals and a very different newspaper took shape.[43]

In June Nicoll wrote to Dods further elucidating his idea for a newspaper which was to be priced at a penny, "A penny [being] a democratic coin," and printed on a sheet similar in size to the Pall Mall Gazette. It was to be Nonconformist, democratic and advanced liberal, filling the same place as the Spectator among Whigs. Nicoll intended to offer "sane sympathy to such movements as Temperance Purity etc. wh: in spite of their leaders and extravagances are really democratic and wh: the Spect only sneers at".[44] The title, which presented the "chief trouble," was finally settled as the British Weekly " - *a la* British Quarterly,"

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would not work with a company. I do not need the money and a free hand is essential." Nicoll to Dods, 7th June 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[42] Nicoll to Dods, 5th May 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[43] Allon, the British Quarterly editor, wrote to Nicoll on 3rd August expressing the wish of the Congregational Ministers that the title and good will of the British Quarterly would only be relinquished "in a way that would maintain the old lines of the Review in the service to [their] churches." Allon to Nicoll, 3rd August 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[44] Nicoll to Dods, 7th June 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

an "intelligible and popular" option.[45]

The new journal was being conceived "above all [to] reflect the views of leaders and direct public opinion;" Nicoll wanted influence.[46] He told Dods, "We want to teach and encourage the leaders of the new Democracy - Primitive Methodist ministers, elders and deacons people who talk about aspirations etc. Further we must make a special appeal to Scotland and Wales the new centres of movement...and above all we must be in confidential and constant touch with the leaders in all parts". Nicoll concluded, "I have no doubt as to the perfect soundness of the scheme - if the leaders will help. But only a very few have yet been sounded - all I met very enthusiastic. I have good reason to know that Chamberlain and Dale will do their utmost". [47]

The second half of the nineteenth century had seen a growth in Free Church newspapers; the Baptist, the British Friend, the Nonconformist and in 1885 the Methodist Times represented only a selection. A month before the publication of the first British Weekly Nicoll wrote to Dods of the "frightful" mortality among newspapers in that year including the British Quarterly; the Clergyman's

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[45] Nicoll to Dods, 7th August 1886, 18th August 1886. Dods suggested the subtitle which was adopted, "A Journal of Christian Progress," Nicoll to Dods, 7th August 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[46] In the following decade Nicoll suggested that Hodder-Williams write a weekly column for the Morning Leader. He concluded, "The advantage is not in the money but in the power." Nicoll to Hodder Williams, 28th April n.d., Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,370.

[47] Nicoll to Dods, 7th June 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

Magazine and the Congregationalist. In the majority of cases he argued that death was "due simply to editorial carelessness and incapacity".[48]

In the summer before publication Nicoll wrote to Dods with a proposal that the first issues of the British Weekly contain the results of a religious census of London which would be sponsored by the newspaper. This would give substance to the many discussions on the religious condition of the metropolis and would also generate publicity. Nicoll anticipated that other papers, meetings, conferences, even Parliament would be compelled to discuss the matter and "every Congregation in London wd at once get to know my name - a result after which otherwise we might strive many years in vain".[49] The idea materialised and the religious census of London provided a novel boost to sales. Four days after publication of the first edition of the British Weekly, Nicoll wrote to J.Macnivan:

> The census is doing us enormous good, and I don't know how we should have got a hearing without it. I never expected it to reach the masses, as the Christian Herald does. But I hoped to reach the vast number of educated Nonconformists in Scotland and England who take no Christian paper, and despise the Nonconformist religious papers for their want of culture. I hope especially to get the ministers.[50]

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[48] Nicoll to Dods, 5th October 1886. On 18th May Nicoll had written to Dods of how sad it was "to see Nonconformist journals ruined one after the other thro gross mismanagement and stupidity." Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[49] Nicoll to Dods, 7th August 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[50] Nicoll to Macniven, 9th November 1886, Darlow, op.cit., p.73.

Nicoll had embarked upon the task with a very strong sense of the constituency he wished to address. G.W.Lawrence has written that Nicoll claimed he had no intention of setting up a newspaper to rival any other.[51] However preparation for the British Weekly revealed it to have a very definite political agenda. Retrospectively Nicoll wrote, "When I began to plan the British Weekly, I determined that under no circumstances should it represent any official party or take any official advice, but that it should be in every respect entirely independent".[52] Yet this did not signal political objectivity. In the first leader Nicoll stated that while his journal would be "independent of any sect or party, [it would] aim at the ends of what is known as Advanced Liberalism".[53] From the outset Nicoll declared his hand as a Chamberlainite but his newspaper was not Liberal Unionist.

ii. The "British Weekly" and Home Rule:

In April 1886 Chamberlain himself explained the support among Liberals for Home Rule as a combination of a feeling in favour of self-government, a desire to have done with the Irish question and loyalty to Mr. Gladstone whose judgement they trusted. The last of these Chamberlain saw

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[51] Lawrence, "William Robertson Nicoll", p.78. A letter to Ernest Hodder-Williams in 1904 suggests that Nicoll was being disingenuous in his claim. Discussing the possibility of setting up another weekly journal, Nicoll wrote, "I shall be attacking a paper already established. The attack on T.P.'s Weekly wd be an infinitely less serious thing than the attack on the Christian World nearly twenty years ago..." Hodder and Stoughton Papers, N.L.S., MS.16,370.

[52] Darlow, op.cit., p.80.

[53] British Weekly, 5th November 1886.

as the most significant.[54] This contemporary reading has influenced more recent historical approaches to the relationship between Nonconformists and the Liberal party. Two main players in the drama, Herbert Gladstone and Chamberlain, made it very clear that Home Rule represented the older Gladstone's continued domination of the party.[55] Therefore it was not surprising that Chamberlain should interpret support for the policy as ultimately a vote of confidence in Gladstone's leadership. D.W. Bebbington has echoed this view, arguing that Nonconformists became advocates of Home Rule out of a traditional sense of loyalty to the Liberal party and more specifically to its leader. He has suggested that those who broke with the Liberal party fell into four categories: Chamberlain's Birmingham supporters, an "intellectual elite", anti-catholics and conservatives.[56]

Bebbington refutes a more generally held contemporary view that Nonconformists backed Home Rule in order to gain support for disestablishment. He argues that disestablishment had ceased to be an urgent issue for all but a few.[57] Yet the evangelical Record wrote of rumours that an "informal agreement" existed between Gladstone and Liberationists, and the Liberal leader would give new

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[54] Chamberlain to Thomas Gee, 26th April 1886, National Library of Wales, MS. 8305 C, F.15a, in Hamer, Gladstone and Rosebery, p.118.

[55] Ibid., pp.114-120.

[56] D.W.Bebbington, The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel in Politics 1870-1914, London 1982, pp.87-93.

[57] Bebbington, Nonconformist Conscience, p.86.

consideration to disestablishment as a result of the political support he had been given by Nonconformists.[58] In Scotland, while the Home Rule Bill was opposed by the Liberal Association, Gladstone received the support of the Federation which had attacked him the previous year for his Church policy.

Nicoll is certainly an exception to Bebbington's rule. He was not bound to the Liberal party out of an attachment to Gladstone, but wrote to Dods in May 1886, "I am much taken up with the idea of Chamberlain making an end of Gladstone wh: is how things look..."[59] Nicoll's expectation that Gladstone would not remain leader for long makes sense of his political actions. For those extra-parliamentary supporters of the Liberal party it was not immediately apparent in 1886 that they had to choose between Chamberlain and Gladstone. Nicoll informed Dods, "I had a long conversation with Guinness Rogers yesterday and he is of the same mind. They [the Liberal party] will have to come back to Chamberlain ...Rogers thinks Gladstone is played out and he has excellent opportunities of knowing people's real mind."[60] This was even more striking as Rogers was a loyal supporter of the Liberal leader. Hamer indicates that in the immediate wake of the Home Rule split many within the Liberal leadership were relieved that the

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[58] Record, 25th June 1886, in W.H.Mackintosh, Disestablishment and Liberation: The Movement for the Separation of the Anglican Church from the State, London 1972, p.304.

[59] Nicoll to Dods, 18th May 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[60] Nicoll to Dods, 5th October 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

chaos of "programme" politics had been replaced by the certainty and order of a "single issue" behind which the party was truly united.[61] However others saw the Home Rule controversy as a division of the natural Liberal party which had been "rent in twain by an angry feud".[62]

The British Weekly grew out of a tactical trend already established by Edward Miall in the 1860s and Chamberlain and the National Education League in the 1870s which included in its agenda reform of broader Liberal policy as well as the aims associated with specific pressure groups. The Nonconformist had become an advocate of bringing pressure to bear upon the Liberal party from within, in a nondisruptive way.[63] Similarly in 1886 Nicoll's decision to remain within the Liberal party did not signal that he accepted every aspect of its programme. He stayed loyal to the Liberal party because to him it was an institution far from synonymous with Gladstonianism. For Nicoll Liberalism was almost as inherent as Nonconformity because Toryism represented the Established Church. The Liberal party - which had abolished compulsory Church rates and disestablished the Irish Church - posed the most realistic vehicle for Nonconformist aspirations. In 1889 the British Weekly recalled a speech Joseph Chamberlain had delivered at Bristol in 1877 in which he stated that "if ever he turned Tory...he thought he should

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[61] Hamer, Gladstone and Rosebery, pp.124-5 also D.A.Hamer, "The Irish Question and Liberal Politics 1886-1894", Historical Journal XII, (1969), pp.520-1.

[62] British Weekly, 5th November 1886.

[63] Hamer, Electoral Pressure, pp.38-39.

turn Churchman too, and also brewer. His belief was that the Church and the public houses were the great supporters of the Conservative party".[64]

Nicoll was not convinced of the value of Gladstone's proposed Irish legislation. "Is there a Protestant in Ireland worth his weight in paving stones in favour of the Bills?" he wrote to Dods in June. Nevertheless the British Weekly editor did not want to become immersed in the debate. He explained, "As Spurgeon [who had joined the Liberal Unionists] expresses my ideas about the Bills, I do not discuss them except with people who like the Irish monks "follow in reploy on the same soide".[65] In a letter to Professor Henry Drummond soliciting contributions for the impending British Weekly Nicoll wrote, "...as to the unfortunate Irish question I am an adherent of Mr. Chamberlain. But in the leading articles we should aim simply at the re-union of the Liberal party, avoiding everything that could irritate. In the signed articles we should allow free expression to both sides".[66] He confessed to Dods, "I wrote to Drummond as humbly as I could, but telling him frankly that I was a Chamberlainite. To tell you the truth, I feel great compunction in asking his help, for I cannot believe in him. All that evangelising, banqueting, reconciling and

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[64] British Weekly, 24th May 1889.

[65] Nicoll to Dods, 7th June 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[66] Nicoll to Drummond, 3rd August 1886, in Darlow, op.cit., p.69.

philandering..."[67]

Drummond was something of an amateur authority on Home Rule and Nicoll specifically asked for two signed articles on "Impressions of Ireland".[68] In the event Drummond contributed two unsigned leaders on the subject in November and December.[69] In this way Drummond helped to set the tone of the British Weekly's response to Home Rule. It was later recalled that Nicoll believed Drummond had the makings of a great journalist, "but he disliked committing himself, and was averse to controversy". Nicoll believed that Drummond was only in partial sympathy with the line taken by the paper as he was an ardent Home Ruler.[70] Nevertheless Nicoll had allowed Drummond considerable influence in the British Weekly's Home Rule debate.

Drummond was a significant acquisition. The newly appointed Viceroy of Ireland, the Earl of Aberdeen, had asked him to join his staff in February 1886 and Gladstone was the most eminent of several Liberals who prevailed upon Drummond to stand for Parliament.[71] Like Nicoll, Drummond appears to have remained with the Liberal party for reasons other than a blinding loyalty to Gladstone. His biographer and friend, George Adam Smith, recounted:

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[67] Nicoll to Dods, 7th August 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[68] Nicoll to Drummond, 3rd August 1886, in Darlow, op.cit., p.69.

[69] Darlow, op.cit., p.69.

[70] Stoddart, William Robertson Nicoll, p.73.

[71] Smith, G.A., The Life of Henry Drummond, London 1910, p.263, p.266.

> He [Drummond] had not been converted by Mr. Gladstone's own judgement...But he had been impressed by the evidence of Lord Spencer, Sir Robert Hamilton, and other statesmen responsible for the government of Ireland who had declared for Home Rule; he recognised that the policy was in agreement with the Liberal principles he professed, and he was attracted by the moral possibilities which he felt it to contain.[72]

Drummond also considered that Gladstone had managed to create the climate in politics to facilitate his policy and this view was consolidated by the Professor's visit to Ireland in the spring of 1886.[73] His natural distrust of the Irish party - due to their support for denominational education - was countered by his lack of sympathy for the position of Ulster protestants.[74] In a private document Drummond outlined the "Reasons For and Against" standing for Parliament. It is clear that he saw the situation in Ireland as a "supreme crisis" to which Christians and patriots had a duty to respond. By actively supporting Gladstone's policy Drummond believed that he would be helping to prevent "...a time of terrible horror and

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[72] Smith, Drummond, pp.264-265.

[73] Smith, Drummond, p.165.

[74] Smith, Drummond, p.265, In the unpublished Recollections of the Late Henry Drummond, his student T.Hunter Boyd recalled that on his return from Belfast he had informed Drummond that "..great excitement had prevailed in Belfast and numerous prayer meetings had been held...to implore the defeat of [the Home Rule Bill]..The chief reason for this intense excitement appeared to be that if this bill passed, the Roman Catholics would in all probability drive the protestants into the sea, or that life would at any rate be made intolerable for Ulster folk. He [Drummond] had no sympathy with this attitude, indeed he thought they might deserve to be driven into the sea if they proved incompetent to maintain their footing on land..." Drummond Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS.Acc 5890(1).

bloodshed in Ireland which may incite the Socialist leaders to attempt a social revolution here".[75] Despite a strong pull towards Parliament, Drummond decided that he could best serve the Liberal party and the "cause of truth and righteousness" by abstaining from a political career.[76]

Electoral defeat allowed "loyal" Liberals the luxury of uniting behind the principle of Home Rule without risking further schism over detail. The British Weekly - in its attempts to avoid exacerbating division - was equally vague in its support for reform in Ireland. It expressed some sympathy for the Plan of Campaign and reminded readers that, "Eviction was a mere pastime with many of our alien proprietors, or their agents. The refusal of the House of Lords to pass Mr. Gladstone's Suspensory Eviction Bill reflected the spirit that has ruled Ireland for weary generations".[77] In a British Weekly leader Drummond proposed that unlike the Conservatives the Liberal party was more concerned with men than with institutions. Consequently, while the Tories could see Home Rule only in terms of Empire, the Liberals were able to look beyond such symbols to the grievances and the "underlying needs, wrongs and aspirations" of the people.[78]

Being an avowed "adherent of Mr. Chamberlain" did not

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[75] n.d. Drummond Papers, MS. Acc.5890(2)

[76] Drummond Papers, MS. Acc 5890(2), Drummond to Gladstone, 15th June 1886, in Smith, Drummond, pp.266-267.

[77] British Weekly, 24th December 1886, 5th November 1886.

[78] British Weekly, 10th December 1886.

preclude Nicoll's support for Home Rule. Chamberlain had conceded the right of Ireland to govern itself on matters of domestic policy and had scorned that "absurd and irritating anachronism known as Dublin Castle",[79] but he felt snubbed by Parnell in the 1885 election and had been continually undervalued and undermined by Gladstone.[80] Chamberlain concentrated much of his attack on the Land Bill during 1886 and condemned not only the estimated expense and lack of security surrounding the legislation but also the way in which it pandered to Irish landlordism.[81]

For those like Nicoll who remained within the Liberal party, Chamberlain did not represent Unionism but Radicalism. Specifically he had been associated in his earlier career with campaigns for nondenominational education and disestablishment and this suggested that he would be alert to the needs of his fellow Dissenters. It seemed clear that if a Chamberlainite ascendancy was to be established within the Liberal party then his supporters would have to remain with Gladstone and exert their increased influence.

"The main body of the Liberal party must prepare a new

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[79] 17th June 1885, in J.Morley, The Life of William Ewart Gladstone Vol.II, London, 1908, p.355.

[80] Chamberlain had also been shocked by the antagonism provoked by his proposed visit to Ireland (with Charles Dilke) in the wake of the fall of the Government. F.S.L.Lyons, Charles Stewart Parnell, Suffolk 1978, pp.288-289.

[81] G.D.Goodlad, "The Liberal Party and Gladstone's Land Purchase Bill of 1886." The Historical Journal 32, 3(1989), pp.627-641.

programme," Nicoll stated in the British Weekly's first leader: "Nothing could be more sterile and disheartening than the idea of going to the country with Home Rule and Mr. Gladstone's four points".[82] Nevertheless the British Weekly endorsed Gladstone's leadership and conspicuously did not specify possible alternatives. It simply concluded with the weak hope that dissentient Liberals would show the slender nature of their alliance with the Tories and "hasten the time when all true Liberals will band themselves together for new campaigns against wrong".[83] The British Weekly argued that Chamberlain should not let his views on Home Rule force him to join hands with Whigs, believing that he had misconstrued the attitude of Parnell and the remaining Liberal party to Gladstone's Bill. On the pivotal issue of attendance of Irish Members at Westminster the British Weekly believed correctly that both Liberals and Irish Nationalists would be prepared to concede.[84]

The underlying contradiction remained that while Nicoll agreed with much of what Chamberlain had to say, the British Weekly would not champion the M.P. while he remained outwith the Liberal party. Even while he was offering what Garvin later called "the metallic imitation

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[82] British Weekly, 5th November 1886. These had been outlined in September 1885: representative local government; simplification of the electoral register; amendment of the land laws and reform of Parliamentary procedure.

[83] British Weekly, 5th November 1886.

[84] British Weekly, 31st December 1886.

of an olive branch"[85] at Birmingham, Chamberlain urged the Liberal party to concentrate on carrying out the vast reforms necessary in England, Scotland and Wales before considering the views of the Home Rulers.[86] But his contention that Liberals were agreed on ninety-nine points of their programme, only disagreeing on one, brought from the British Weekly the response that it was the first and not the hundredth point which had caused the division and that in a personal sense Chamberlain had most to gain by making peace with the party.[87] This was a warning to the Birmingham M.P. that he could not rely indefinitely on the support of Liberals as he perpetuated the party rift.

The British Weekly's admonishing of Chamberlain continued during the Liberal party's abortive attempts to mend its division. During the Round Table Conference in the opening months of 1887 Liberals, the British Weekly claimed, waited with "intense anxiety" for the result and believed that Chamberlain could be accommodated within the Liberal party with little real compromise on his part.[88] It warned that failure to reach agreement would represent a "fresh fracture" for the Liberal party.[89] Both sides proved intractable. The Scotsman noted of Chamberlain's Birmingham speech that on certain vital principles of

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[85] J.L.Garvin, The Life of Joseph Chamberlain Vol.II 1885-1895, London 1933, p.279.

[86] Meeting of the Liberal Divisional Council at West Birmingham, 23rd December 1886, in Garvin, op.cit., p.278.

[87] British Weekly, 31st December 1886.

[88] British Weekly, 31st December 1886.

[89] British Weekly, 14th January 1887.

Gladstonian Home Rule Chamberlain had not yielded an inch.[90] The Times argued that Chamberlain had no intention of surrendering the principles for which he had fought and concluded - in much the same vein as the British Weekly - that among Gladstonian followers there were signs of revolt against the Parnellite alliance. It observed the tendency in these circles to abandon and disavow Gladstone's Home Rule proposals.[91]

The British Weekly's position was further tested when the fitful progress of Round Table negotiations (which took place for a third time on 14th February) was halted completely by the publication of a letter from Chamberlain to the Baptist. It was a response to the accusation by Gladstone that the Liberal Unionists were responsible for the postponement of a Welsh Disestablishment Bill.[92] Chamberlain countered with the view that the great advancement which the cause of Welsh Disestablishment had made in recent years had been:

> ...negated by the arrival on the political scene of a new subject, whose settlement may be long delayed, but to which we are told everything, including the just and pressing demands of "poor little Wales," must give way. Poor little Wales indeed if this be true and if its people accept this summary dismissal of their claims.

Chamberlain's letter was reprinted in the national dailies. Its criticisms reiterated many of his arguments

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[90] Garvin, op.cit., p.280.

[91] Times 13th January 1887.

[92] Garvin, op.cit., p.292.

during the general election of the previous year; putting forward the case of the "crofters of Scotland and the agricultural labourers of England".[93] The statement in the Baptist outlined the differing priorities which had split the Liberal party. Its author claimed that Round Table negotiations would decide not only the future of the Irish question but the future of the Liberal party and its reform programme.[94]

Chamberlain asserted that the Welsh Nonconformists had supported Gladstone's Irish Bills in order to "arrive more quickly at the realms of their own hopes". The idea that the Liberal party was indebted to Nonconformists was one which the British Weekly returned to again and again in the years to follow. So too did it echo Chamberlain's arguments that the Liberal party had to be aware of problems beyond Ireland. Yet in February 1887 the British Weekly gave scant coverage to the publication of the letter in the Baptist. It noted that Chamberlain's actions had made the process of Liberal unity unnecessarily painful and was "straining very hard the faith of his friends". The British Weekly did not accept the letter's central thesis and countered that much time had been wasted at the Round Table Conference due to Chamberlain's belief in the possibility of resolving issues such as disestablishment before some form of Irish settlement.[95]

Guinness Rogers shed some retrospective light on the

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[93] Times, 25th February 1887.

[94] Times, 25th February 1887.

[95] British Weekly, 4th March 1887.

position of Nonconformists as the split within the Liberal party hardened into permanency. He argued that, "Mr. Chamberlain's greatest mistake was his alliance with the Tories in order to force his views upon Liberals. The question - whether as to Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy itself or to the mode in which it was presented to the party - was one for the Liberals themselves to settle".[96] The British Weekly was certainly out of sympathy with Chamberlain's determination to dictate his terms to the Liberal party externally and saw this intransigence as the real obstacle to progress. This was more frustrating in view of the British Weekly's belief that Chamberlain could find support within the Liberal party if he would abandon his battle of strength with Gladstone.[97] Rogers concluded:

> In allying himself with the Tories in order to defeat his old chief Mr. Chamberlain sacrificed the interests of Liberalism and laid himself open to accusations of disloyalty,...No politician who pursued the extraordinary course which Mr. Chamberlain took in the Liberal Unionist split could expect to escape the severest censure from those whom he had deserted...It is not necessary to say there was betrayed trust, but there certainly was disappointed hope.[98]

Rogers was a more devoted follower of Gladstone than Nicoll but the frustration at chances lost was equally palpable.

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[96] J. Guinness Rogers, op.cit., p.258.

[97] In 1894 the British Weekly claimed that it had never made any secret of the fact that Chamberlain had been badly treated by Gladstone, and that the Birmingham M.P.had acted in perfect conscientiousness in his revolt against the Home Rule Bill. 13th September 1894.

[98] J. Guinness Rogers, op.cit., p.260.

iii. Gladstone Blocks the Way:

Only a week after it criticised Chamberlain's letter to the Baptist, the British Weekly argued that the political climate for disestablishment had changed because most Nonconformists had remained loyal to the party, while most Whigs (who had used their influence with Gladstone to oppose disestablishment) were now Unionists.[99] By the end of 1887 the British Weekly still expressed optimism over the future of disestablishment because Gladstone's apparent endorsement of the cause suggested that it was no longer denominational but rather a question of principle.[100] In fact it had never been an exclusively Nonconformist issue.

However the changing nature of British society had removed much of the intensity from the disestablishment debate. Proportionally Nonconformist numbers were declining and in the democratization of the political world social questions were overtaking old religious grievances in the discourse of justice and equality.[101] In May 1888 a British Weekly reader expressed the concern that "at present nobody knows there is a question of Disestablishment" and the newspaper conceded the Bishop of London's view that "a lull had come" in the debate. "The

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[99] British Weekly, 11th March 1887. The leader was prompted by the Scotsman's contention that Dissent was a spent political force due to its increasing support for Unionism.

[100] British Weekly, 23rd December 1887.

[101] Machin, op.cit., p.174.

very peculiar political situation ha[d] for the time removed the question from the front", the British Weekly had concluded from its poll of Liberal and Liberal Unionist M.P.s. Generally the Liberal Unionists confessed to being so preoccupied with Home Rule that they had little time to write about anything else.[102] Although the nominal support for disestablishment among Liberal politicians appeared to be significant it was in fact informal and not highly prioritized.[103]

The Liberation Society also suffered from lack of support. Impeded by financial constraints the Society found it difficult to find young men to fill positions of leadership. The disestablishment of the Irish Church had set a precedent which encouraged the Scottish and Welsh Churches to concentrate on their own separate demands, thus fragmenting the Voluntary movement and removing support from the central Liberation Society. Although Welsh disestablishment became part of the Liberal party programme in October 1887, Gladstone did not commit the party to the disestablishment of the Scottish Church until 1889.[104] In 1887 the Welsh voluntary campaign became riotous in opposition to the imposition of tithes. The British Weekly urged Liberal leaders to look at the

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[102] British Weekly, 4th May 1888.

[103] Despite the fact that the number of Liberal M.P.s claiming to endorse disestablishment in 1885 was 171 out of 333 and in 1895 was 162 out of 175, in 1897 only 86 of the 162 made the effort to vote for the Bill. Bebbington, Nonconformist Conscience, p.24.

[104] W.H.Mackintosh, Disestablishment and Liberation, pp.293-4, D.A.Hamer, Gladstone and Rosebery, pp.20-21, Machin, op.cit., pp.193, 197.

cause of the rebellion before advocating the repression of its symptoms.[105]

Henry Dunckley LL.D. argued in the British Weekly that disestablishment was a measure "pertaining to the general politics of the nation, though it is one in which Nonconformists naturally take a special interest, since the maintenance of a state Church is at variance with their principles and opposed to their interests in many ways".[106] To Nicoll the elitism, which bestowed on the Church of England a sense of moral superiority, was a great anomaly in an increasingly democratic society. Yet it was the extending franchise which most threatened the political life of disestablishment. The British Weekly warned that female suffrage would help to "build round establishments an almost impregnable fortification". More importantly the 1884 Reform Act, by bringing more working class voters into the system, had ensured the primacy of the social reform debate over disestablishment. The British Weekly chose to argue that increased democracy could result in the drive for disestablishment being removed from the hands of Christians. It warned that the dismantling of the Church would inevitably fall prey to the predatory instincts of the masses adding, "We should like [disestablishment] to come otherwise: as the work of Christian men, done in a Christian spirit, which means a just and even a generous regard to every possible claim, and an earnest desire to

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[105] British Weekly, 3rd June 1887.

[106] British Weekly, 10th May 1889.

recognise the position and feelings of those affected".[107]

The politics of Home Rule had offered Nicoll his political baptism. Within two years of Chamberlain's letter to the Baptist, the British Weekly had come to understand that loyalty to the reduced Gladstonian Liberal party did not guarantee the leadership's commitment to religious equality. In October 1888 the British Weekly echoed Chamberlain in its demand that the Irish question should not be placed above all other issues, arguing that even if Home Rule were to be passed it would not lead to an immediate settlement. It reminded Liberal and Liberal Unionist Nonconformists that the great trust specially committed to them was the cause of religious freedom.[108]

By May 1889 the British Weekly stated plainly its belief that Gladstone was an old man with one cause who would bring about the further postponement of disestablishment in Scotland and Wales.[109] Lewis Dillwyn had moved a Welsh disestablishment motion in the Commons on the 14th and Gladstone had been absent.[110] In October 1890 the British Weekly expressed, "little doubt that Mr.

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[107] British Weekly, 31st May 1889, Nicoll's belief that women were more generally opposed to disestablishment was confirmed two years later during a debate on this question which was reported in the British Weekly by Priscilla Partington. She concluded that "Women who, on all other questions, were liberal and even Radical in their opinions, were fossilized Conservatives on this [disestablishment]. Religion seemed to have a strangely narrowing effect on certain minds." British Weekly, 26th March 1891.

[108] British Weekly, 26th October 1888.

[109] British Weekly, 31st May 1889.

[110] Machin, op.cit., p.193, K.O.Morgan, Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922, Cardiff, 1963, p.82.

Gladstone has consciously altered the natural course of events in order to avert disestablishment. He has plunged into the Irish question, and tried to make it the only one. But the disestablishment question will not down..."[111] Resentment was also expressed over the fact that although Gladstone appeared to be obliged to the Free Churches, his most faithful supporters, he had very little contact with their leaders and failed to recognise their special contentions and grievances.[112] The lack of value placed upon Nonconformist loyalty was all the more galling beside the power of the Irish Nationalists. They lined up behind Parnell with the view that Irish interests could best be served by total independence from the main political parties. In reality the Irish Members had forfeited practical independence once the Liberals had accepted responsibility for the Home Rule Bill.[113] But they could

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[111] British Weekly, 30th October 1890. Even Guinness Rogers was later able to suggest the possibility that Gladstone had hampered the progress of Nonconformists: in 1876 with the Bulgarian agitation and again in 1885 with the introduction of the Home Rule controversy. Guinness Rogers, op.cit., p.214.

[112] British Weekly, 30th October 1890. In July 1914 Nicoll returned to this theme while writing some words on Chamberlain's career, "I cannot understand how anyone who has studied Gladstone's career can fail to see that he regarded Dissenters with something like loathing. He knew that he was mainly indebted to them for his political victories.....Under extreme circumstances he would even compliment them and address their meetings and tolerate their company. But he never made a real friend, so far as I know, of any Dissenter." British Weekly, 9th July 1914.

[113] F.S.L.Lyons, "The Political Ideas of Parnell," Historical Journal, XVI 4, (1973), p.769.

never be seen as team players.[114]

iv. Revenge on the Irish:

The vigour with which certain Nonconformists attacked Parnell during the divorce scandal of 1890 was the result of an ongoing frustration with the degree of political influence exercised by the Irish. Ministers like Price Hughes of the Methodist Times were more concerned with the punishment of Parnell than they were with Irish politics. Parnell's downfall offered the opportunity for "respectable revenge" along with a chance to gain greater power in shaping the Liberal party and underlining its religious conviction. John Kent suggests convincingly that:

> ..the real, if concealed, issue in the Parnell case was political power...Home Rule could not be abandoned in Gladstone's lifetime but at least Parnell must go, and with him yet another obstacle in the way of bringing about the ascendancy of the Nonconformists in the Liberal party itself. Only an *emotional* involvement explains the bitterness with which Hughes denounced the Irish people as well as their

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[114] Parnell distinguished himself from his predecessor Isaac Butt by his insistence that the Irish members should not be bound by policy or parliamentary convention to the British parties. Lyons, "Political Ideas of Parnell," pp.753-4. During Gladstone's second Ministry the Irish Nationalists commonly voted against the Government on free votes. The main bugbear however between Nationalists and Radicals remained religious education. Parnell's 1885 Manifesto urged his fellow-countrymen to vote against Liberals who, among other things, had "menaced religious liberty in the school," and Lyons has further suggested that the possible reason for the cancellation of the 1885 trip to Ireland by Chamberlain and Dilke was that the Irish clergy were aware that under Chamberlain's "central board" scheme education might have come under the control of secular Radicals. Lyons, Parnell, pp.268; 302; 289.

leader.[115]

If on this occasion the Free Churches stood alone and won, it was because the struggle was political rather than moral: "Parnell did not really fall victim to British puritanism: he fell on the cleaner field of British politics".[116] Parnell certainly gave life to the view that he was the victim of a political conspiracy when he told the Freeman's Journal that those who had plotted against him in the case of the Piggott forgeries were once again afoot.[117] Contemporary wisdom also implicated Chamberlain in the timing of the scandal.[118]

Hughes was in part acting from a desire to engender unity among the Free Churches and to parade their moral and

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[115] J.Kent, "Hugh Price Hughes and the Nonconformist Conscience" in G.V.Bennett and J.D.Walsh (eds) Essays in Modern English Church History, London 1966, p.194.

[116] Ibid., p.194. It was of course in the interests of the Nonconformist press to insist that it was a moral and not a political question. British Weekly, 27th November 1890.

[117] Freeman's Journal, 30 December 1890, in Lyons, Parnell, p.453.

[118] Lyons, Parnell, p.455. On the event of Chamberlain's death the following interesting conversation took place between Lloyd George and George Riddell:
"Riddell: There is one side of his [Chamberlain's] character of which little is said. He was a political thug. He brought to bear upon Nineteenth Century politics the morals and conventions of the Middle Ages. If a man stood in his way he had to go down. I suppose there is no doubt that he engineered Parnell's downfall by advising O'Shea to bring the divorce case and possibly by assisting him with funds?
L.G.: Yes, I have always heard so. I wonder whether he was justified? I should not have done it but it is a nice question whether such a proceeding may not be justifiable in the interests of a great cause..." 9th July 1914, Riddell Diaries, British Library, Add MS.62974, f.112.

political strength.[119] Although the venom with which Nonconformists denounced Parnell was specific to this scandal the language was familiar to the campaign for social purity.[120] The Free Churches had expressed the same moral censure in the divorce scandal involving Charles Dilke in 1886 and opposed his return to politics in 1891.[121]

While covering the exposure of Parnell's affair the British Weekly declared it "a result profoundly to be regretted from every point of view" and expressed a message of sympathy to the Irish nation whose leaders, by their own folly had removed Home Rule from the immediate Liberal party agenda.[122] The newspaper's subliminal tone was one of restrained excitement. It seemed that the Irish members had delivered Nicoll from his campaign to relax Liberal concentration on self government for Ireland. The prospect that Parnell had a future in politics was not entertained in the weeks between the divorce case and the historic meeting of the Irish party in Committee Room 15.

Nicoll was not as notoriously anti-Irish as Hughes who told his audience at the St. James Hall, "We have sacrificed much for Ireland...But there is one thing we

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[119] J.Munson, The Nonconformists: In Search of a Lost Culture, London 1991, pp.215-6.

[120] John Glaser has suggested that Parnell's failure to contest the divorce allowed him to be portrayed as deceitful and untrustworthy and this helps to explain the bitterness of the attack on him. J.F.Glaser, "Parnell's Fall and the Nonconformist Conscience," Irish Historical Studies, Volume XII, 1960-1, p.121.

[121] Munson, Nonconformists, pp.215-6.

[122] British Weekly, 20th November 1890.

will never sacrifice and that is our religion".[123] Nevertheless the British Weekly asserted that the editor of the Methodist Times was speaking for thousands of liberal voters in (one of his more extreme statements) arguing that the Irish would prove themselves to be so obscene a race as to make them unfit for self government if they were deliberately to cleave to Parnell.[124] The defence was compounded by the view that the zealous support of Price Hughes for Irish Home Rule previous to the divorce case gave particular weight to his protests in the crisis.[125] Nicoll, with fellow Nonconformists, enjoyed this licence to indulge both a long held resentment of Home Rule and a self righteousness made more glorious by the hesitation of the Romanists in Ireland.[126]

The British Weekly stated that the political future of Parnell was simply a question of limits, "the meanness, treachery, lust, and unblushing hardihood of Mr. Parnell remove him far beyond possibility". Nevertheless it took issue with the view that the cause of Home Rule was "buried in the cross-roads and a stake driven through its heart so

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[123] Methodist Times, 27th November 1890, in Glaser, "Parnell's Fall" p.128.

[124] This is referring to a piece by Hughes in the Methodist Times, 20th November 1890, in Lyons, Parnell, p.487. An endorsement appeared in the British Weekly, 11th December 1890.

[125] British Weekly, 11th December 1890.

[126] "The appalling and criminal silence of the Roman Catholic Bishops and priests is perhaps the most astounding fact of the situation, and will not readily be forgotten....Meanwhile we are free to rejoice that the Nonconformists of this country have once more shown that there is that in them which may be trusted in the day of moral battle." British Weekly, 27th November 1890.

that it [could] trouble men no more".[127] But if Home Rule was not buried at the cross-roads it was certainly waylaid there, and the British Weekly took the opportunity in the weeks which followed to labour again the view that Home Rule was not the whole of Liberalism:

> Home Rule is not the beginning and end of liberalism. There are questions of still greater moment, which bring all true Liberals instantly together, and give the party a prospect it has not had for long...Questions have ripened rapidly in these trying years. Liberals are longing to deal with social problems. The awful drink question is heavy on their consciences. No subject roused enthusiasm at Sheffield [1890 N.L.F. Conference] like that of religious equality. Why should we not see an honest attempt to unite the party on the old great subjects, and leave the Irish question alone till this frenzy be overpast? Even in other circumstances it was not enough *by itself* to generate a victorious enthusiasm.[128]

v. "Old Great Subjects": Disestablishment:

The "arrears of legislation" continued to accumulate and although Gladstone gave unenthusiastic support to the sectionalism famously encapsulated in the Newcastle Programme of the following year, Ireland continued to "block the way" in the mind of the Liberal leader.[129] The British Weekly had warned of the weariness of those who had "ground in the Liberal mill these many years...and even yet

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[127] British Weekly 27th November 1890. The following week the British Weekly warned that, "The one chance Parnell has is that the Liberal party should now repudiate Home Rule. In that case he should soon be a greater power than before. But Home Rule is not the whole of Liberalism..." 4th December 1890.

[128] British Weekly, 27th November 1890.

[129] R.Jenkins, Asquith, London 1988, pp.56-7.

have had almost no effectual redress".[130] Yet it gave uncritical support to the litany of commitments in the party agenda which gave recognition to those "old great subjects" representing Nonconformist interests. The General Election of 1892 was underpinned by religious tension given the prominence of Home Rule and disestablishment in the hustings and leaders such as Gladstone, Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith declared in favour of disestablishment.[131] However the commitment was half-hearted and a British Weekly reader argued that Gladstone's reduced majority in Midlothian - which was attributed to his support for disestablishment - would not have been so far reduced had the leader educated the public in the justice of the cause.[132]

The new Liberal administration proved a disappointment to those impatient for religious equality. The British Weekly urged Wales to fight for a higher priority for disestablishment than it had been given in the Queen's Speech and promised that Liberalism as opposed to Mr. Gladstone was on their side.[133] Inevitably Home Rule dominated the first session and the Welsh Church Suspensory Bill - which was intended as the first step to disestablishment - was introduced in February 1893 and withdrawn seven months later due to lack of Parliamentary time.

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[130] British Weekly, 16th April 1891.

[131] Machin, op.cit., p.205.

[132] British Weekly, 4th August 1892.

[133] British Weekly, 2nd February 1893.

The British Weekly continued to maintain that Gladstone was the real stumbling block to progress in the Liberal party programme. "My hopes of Gladstone being any good to Scotland, or Wales, or any place else, are very slight," Nicoll wrote to Rev. McRobbie in 1893, "He seems to me to be the greatest curse of the country, and how many are fallen while he lingers on plotting and scheming!"[134] Rumours that Gladstone was to resign in the early months of 1894 elicited from Nicoll's newspaper the view that the Liberal leader was merely using the threat to force the party to accept an unadulterated policy of Home Rule. The British Weekly warned:

> This, [move by Gladstone] it is calculated, will reduce the insistence of Welshmen and Temperance reformers to inarticulate grumblings which may well be disregarded, and allow for Irish legislation once more occupying the almost undivided attention of the House of Commons. If that is conceded we shall hear no more of Mr. Gladstone's retirement.[135]

Confirmation that Gladstone was to retire came as, "no surprise to those who, like ourselves, never believed that he would deal practically with disestablishment in Wales".[136] The British Weekly responded to Lloyd George's threat of an independent Welsh party to press for disestablishment by agreeing that the political honour of

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[134] Nicoll to McRobbie, n.d. [1893], in Darlow, op.cit., p.108.

[135] British Weekly, 8th February 1894.

[136] British Weekly, 1st March 1894.

Wales was now at stake.[137] Asquith introduced a Disestablishment Bill on 26th April which the British Weekly deemed "satisfactory".[138] Countering the view that it was pointless to pass a Disestablishment Bill until the House of Lords had been reformed, the British Weekly argued that it was necessary to proceed with the legislation so that it could be put to the country, the democratic will being set against the will of the Upper House.[139]

Harcourt's Budget took up much Parliamentary time in this session but he promised that the party would deal fairly with the rest of its programme. The British Weekly hailed this revival of Newcastle as "a policy to awaken Liberal enthusiasm as nothing else could".[140] It demanded a vigorous movement in the constituencies which would explain and promote the question of disestablishment. "There is no political subject which has received a place in political speeches so disproportionate to its importance..."[141]

The Welsh Bill did not reach its second reading. Talk of the dissolution of Parliament in November 1894 revealed the unwillingness of the Liberal administration to carry on trying to reconcile the backlog of demands being pressed by its loyal sectionalists. In December the British Weekly angrily attacked the Government for failing to approach the question of disestablishment with proper resolve and warned

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[137] British Weekly, 19th August 1894.

[138] British Weekly, 3rd May 1894.

[139] British Weekly, 24th May 1894.

[140] British Weekly, 9th August 1894.

[141] British Weekly, 23rd August 1894.

that it would rather vote for a Government which professed its support for the Established Church than one which claimed to be against it and did nothing to fulfil its promises.[142]

In the last session of the Liberal Ministry Scottish Disestablishment was not mentioned in the Queen's speech.[143] The British Weekly wrote an impassioned plea to Scottish Nonconformists to fight against this pecking order. It warned the Free Churches that disestablishment was more important than Church unity at this juncture and harangued the Government whose actions had been conspicuously pusillanimous, uncertain and unwise throughout.[144] At a time when sections of the party were trying to re-invent the whole, sectarianism was more obviously outmoded.

Conclusion:

The British Weekly had been created to appeal to a very specific readership: middle class, Liberal, Nonconformist. Nicoll claimed later "I represent nobody but myself; my party is under my hat and will remain so".[145] But this type of aloofness was not the way to assure large circulation or exert political pressure. It was important for the success of the British Weekly that it was seen to represent not only the interests but also the views of the Free Churches. This position added strength to Nicoll's

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[142] British Weekly, 6th December 1894.

[143] Machin, op.cit., pp.213-4.

[144] British Weekly, 14th March 1895.

[145] Nicoll to Dods, n.d., Darlow, op.cit., p.80.

voice within the Liberal party but did not guarantee success to his particular agenda.

The British Weekly had supported Gladstone and Home Rule not only with the understanding that disestablishers would have moral and numerical strength within the Liberal party after the flight of the Whigs but with the expectation that Chamberlain would obtain the leadership. Nicoll had been deluded into believing that if Nonconformists played the party game they would consolidate their position and win some reward. But he was confronted by a Liberal leadership which did not relish the prospect of filling its cup with sectional interests.

The British Weekly argued that the emphasis in the disestablishment debate should rest with the rightness of the cause and not with the majority verdict of the people: otherwise the Irish could legitimately establish the Catholic Church.[146] (This was also to compensate for the fact that only in Wales was there an overwhelming majority in favour of voluntaryism.) This type of logic did not convert itself into practical politics. Equally the language for religious equality had become antiquated and disendowment became a greater concern than disestablishment in the 1890s. The British Weekly was left to harry the younger generation for their silence and asked young Scottish men, "Is the whole business indecent and contaminating, unfit to be touched by self-respecting men? Is the agitation for disestablishment in itself

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[146] British Weekly, 24th January 1895.

disreputable, that no young leader touches it...?"[147]

Nicoll's frustration at the general lack of determination in the cause of religious equality exposed the actual nature of his newspaper. It was very much a pressure paper with its own agenda. The British Weekly was never truly at home in the Liberal party because its constant point of reference was the advantage to be gained in the campaign for religious equality. Equally Nicoll did not always follow the majority line of the Free Churches. As the British Weekly gained in stature it increasingly took its own view. There was some truth in Nicoll's boast, "With all my crimes I am conscious of never having written to please people - of very often the reverse".[148] From the outset the British Weekly determined to lead not to follow public opinion.

Nicoll's uneasiness in the Liberal party left him to gravitate towards its outsiders. The British Weekly bemoaned the departure of Chamberlain, "No true Liberal should be ashamed to say that he vehemently desires Mr. Chamberlain in his day of the battle..."[149] It remarked of the schism, "The whole business is sad; but there is nothing in it sadder than the thought of our lost leaders".[150] However Chamberlain's inability to renegotiate his position within the Liberal party robbed him of Free

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[147] British Weekly, 30th May 1895.

[148] Nicoll to Dods, n.d. Darlow, op.cit., p.80.

[149] British Weekly, 31st December 1886.

[150] British Weekly, 1st April 1887.

Church support within a year of the split.[151]

Nicoll was therefore left to seek a new political counterpart to champion his cause. The marginalisation of his agenda led him always to cleave to those who found the party political system restrictive. His most effective pairing would come with Lloyd George but in the interim the British Weekly went searching for an efficient, electable Radicalism and found Liberal Imperialism.

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[151] Throughout 1887 the British Weekly made it clear that it was tired of Chamberlain's unpredictability.

CHAPTER TWO

EVANGELICAL NONCONFORMITY AND THE SEARCH FOR ADVANCED LIBERALISM

Nicoll aimed to reinforce the religious faith of his readers and to present Liberalism as the true political manifestation of Christianity. Theologically he was wedded to a conservative Evangelical dogma. However in the later nineteenth century residual Evangelicalism had been increasingly threatened by theological shifts which were the result of Biblical criticism and the rejection of concentration on sin and punishment. The Incarnational view, that Heavenly providence need not be undermined by attempts to eradicate social evil, called for a re-examination of the social and political role of Christians.[1] It allowed for a freer interpretation of an individual's responsibility to the community. Children of Evangelical clergy - like Wallas and the Hammonds - had begun to look to Socialism for an energetic pursuit of social justice.[2] Nicoll conceded the need for social reform although holding on to the belief that salvation of the soul could not simply be achieved through the restoration of the body. This chapter explores the religious temper and changing political position of the British Weekly from the 1880s to the upheaval of Balfour's Education Act in 1902.

At a time when many Christians were accepting a more interventionist model, Gladstonian Liberalism looked increasingly obscurantist. Sidney Webb argued that in the

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[1] B.Hilton, The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865, Oxford, 1988, p.303.

[2] P.Clark, Liberals and Social Democrats, Cambridge 1978, *passim*.

1880s and 1890s the aspirations and watchwords of Liberalism had "become increasingly distasteful to the ordinary citizen".[3] Socialism appeared to provide righteous language for and a pro-active response to industrial poverty but - like Gladstonianism - it failed to reply to the Imperial spirit of the Age. The Positivists provided a Liberal discourse for State intervention and Liberal Imperialists converted this into the language of national efficiency. This creed accepted the idea of a minimum standard in domestic life and embraced the Empire as a benign provider. Nicoll could accept more easily the idea of State intervention when it was couched within an Imperial framework: domestic reform in the name of efficiency was more palatable than the prospect of high-spending, old style Progressivism. But consistently it was Rosebery's position on the Free Church agenda and on Home Rule which were the main determinants in Nicoll's support for Liberal Imperialism.

i. The Transition of Christian Dogma:

Nicoll believed that, "religious papers did not give enough direct religious instruction, and that the leading articles should be devoted to this, not to ecclesiastical matters or politics or literature chiefly, but to

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[3] S.Webb, "Rosebery's Escape From Houndsditch" Nineteenth Century and After, Vol. L, September 1901, p.367.

religion".[4] Nicoll's religious convictions helped to set the tone of the British Weekly. In December 1887 it stated, "In theology we maintain Evangelical principles. A man is evangelical in the true sense who glories in the Cross. We fight against the tendency to belittle the Redemption".[5]

Nicoll's theological conservatism had helped to earn for him the editorship of the Expositor in 1884. He replaced Samuel Cox whose views on future punishment and Biblical inspiration were at odds with those of the publishers Hodder and Stoughton.[6] However Nicoll's theological conservatism did not prevent him overseeing the publication of more liberal views. While editor, he allowed the Expositor to become a platform of quite free discussion although writing little of the journal himself.[7] Equally despite undoubtedly having reservations about the intellectual departures of contributors to the British Weekly, Nicoll explained to Dods, "You must in a religious journal deal with men whom the religious public care for - just as the political papers do with Chamberlain".[8]

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[4] Darlow, op.cit., pp.81-82.

[5] British Weekly, 23rd December 1887.

[6] W.B.Glover, Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century, London, 1954, p.147, in M.R.Watts, "John Clifford and Radical Nonconformity, 1836-1923." Unpublished D.Phil., Oxford, 1967, p.82.

[7] Chadwick highlights the Expositor as one of the journals which broke the silence (in 1887) on the dilemmas for Churches and theological colleges inherent in Biblical criticism. O.Chadwick, The Victorian Church, Part II, London, 1972, p.98.

[8] Nicoll to Dods, n.d., Nicoll Papers, Lumsden. In 1887 British Weekly readers chose Clifford, Spurgeon and Maclaren as the three most popular Baptist preachers in the country. British

Consequently the British Weekly charted a middle ground between Spurgeon's "other-worldly" Christianity (Nicoll did not become involved in the Down Grade witch-hunt[9]) and Clifford's Christian Socialism.[10]

Although science was no longer seen as a direct threat to religious belief in the 1880s, it had altered the nature of theological debate. Darwin's evolutionary theory - expanded in Origin of the Species (1859) and Descent of Man (1871) - had prompted scepticism of the traditional creation "story" which had no historical basis.[11] Theologians began to treat the Bible as a historical text and in 1864 the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council had established the right of clergymen to treat parts of the Bible as unhistorical. Twenty years later the mythical nature of much of the Old Testament had largely been conceded by educated laymen.[12] Drummond declared:

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[9] When Spurgeon withdrew from the Baptist Union the British Weekly argued that while it could understand Spurgeon, his point of view appeared, "a *reductio ad absurdum* of all organisation in creedless churches." It urged orthodox men to remain in the Union and to take a more prominent part in order to protect evangelical nonconformity. British Weekly, 4th November 1887.

[10] The first issue of the British Weekly carried a review of Clifford's "Dawn of Manhood," in which he attacked religious dogmatism, arguing that Christianity should be a way of life before it was a collection of beliefs. The anonymous reviewer criticised both the "vicious style" and doctrinal position of the work. British Weekly, 5th November 1886, in Watts, op.cit., pp.91-92.

[11] A.Vincent and R.Plant, Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: the life and thought of British idealists, Oxford 1984, p.7.

[12] Chadwick, op.cit., p.95, p.58.

> The contest is dying out. The new view of the Bible has rendered further apologetics almost superfluous...No one now expects science from the Bible. The literary form of Genesis precludes the idea that it is science...The more modern views of the Bible have destroyed the stock-in-trade of the platform infidel. Such men are constructing difficulties that do not exist.[13]

The Free Churches were slower than Anglicans to accept the inherent benefits of Biblical scholarship, but by the end of the century it had ceased to be a contentious issue for almost all educated Nonconformists.[14] Nicoll was always wary of undue theological scepticism. In 1886 he wrote to Dods concerning the reality that no story in the Book of Genesis had any traceable connection in fact, positing the view that, "they [were] true & that relation to fact is like 'whether it is best to wear a nightcap' no man knows and no man shall ever know".[15]

Nicoll became indebted to Henry Drummond for theological contributions to the British Weekly although he could not always find enthusiasm for the Professor's point of view.[16] The success of Drummond's Natural Law in the Spiritual World in 1883 had highlighted the public's

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[13] Smith, Drummond, pp.131-2.

[14] R.J.Helmstadter, "The Nonconformist Conscience" in The Conscience of the Victorian State, edited by P.Marsh, Hassocks, 1979, p.161.

[15] Nicoll to Dods, 20th September 1886, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[16] Nicoll wrote to Dods, "Drummond has been most kind.I feel crushed by a sense of obligation to him wh: I have no means of in any way discharging." 11th December, n.d. [1886]. After Drummond's death, Nicoll wrote thanking Marcus Dods for his kind words on Drummond and confessed that he did not feel that he "cd. write with sufficient sympathy for his ideas to do him justice." 6th April 1897, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

appetite for natural science couched in the author's sincere evangelical beliefs. Matthew Arnold believed that the more serious portion of the anti-clerical world accepted the book as a "godsend," believing it to offer, "safety and scientific shelter for the orthodox supernaturalism which seemed menaced with total defeat". He continued, "What is certain is, that the author of the book has a genuine love of religion and a genuine religious experience; this gives his book a certain value, though his readers, in general, imagine its value to be quite another kind".[17] Nicoll disliked the confusion in Natural Law and in 1897 wrote to James Denney, "Probably what riled me...in his books was not anything that he said so much as what he did not say - the airy way in which he seemed to do without all that to common Christians was indispensable".[18]

In the mid century Essays and Reviews had publicly acknowledged that there existed a gap between the beliefs of scholars and ordinary believers.[19] Nicoll was among those who continued to fear that the subtleties of academic argument would lead to confusion and unbelief when translated to a broader audience. In 1894 he wrote to Denney regarding a series of lectures the latter had given in Chicago. Nicoll believed that not enough emphasis had been placed on the fact that the Bible constituted the only

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[17] Copy of a letter from Matthew Arnold to M.Foutanes, 18th July 1885, (published by Macmillan 1895) Drummond Papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc 5890 (2).

[18] Nicoll to Denney, 15th March 1897, in Darlow, op.cit., p.155.

[19] Chadwick, op.cit., pp.76-7.

revelation given to humans of God. He was critical of scholarship which treated the Bible as a purely secular historical text, bereft of supernatural inspiration or mystery. Nicoll warned Denney that he "should take account of the arguments and thoughts about the Bible that are moving in ordinary minds," concluding, "I feel sure you cannot simply ignore the attitude of Christ to the Old Testament. If we could put people just there, all would be right - at that standpoint of freedom and fearlessness and yet reverence and love and trust, the difficulty would be over".[20]

Concern for the future of Christianity permeated all Nicoll's political and social responses. In superseding Evangelicalism, the Nonconformist churches offered no equally unifying replacement. The introduction of a rational, less absolute dogma was not as emotionally rewarding for many churchgoers. Nicoll was fearful of the over-intellectualisation of religion. In 1889 the British Weekly conceded that a rationalistic view of religion recommended itself to many minds, but countered that Christianity was enthusiastic or nothing. Ultimately history had shown, the British Weekly believed, that reason would be overthrown by revival.[21] In 1898 Nicoll wrote to the Primitive Methodist Professor Peake, "It is not that I am opposed to people getting educated and reading books: far from it. But the value of all that is being enormously

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[20] Nicoll to Denney, 7th August, 1894, Darlow, op.cit., pp.341-42.

[21] British Weekly, 1st February 1889.

exaggerated. I feel I would much rather have the superstitions of the Roman Catholic Church than a great deal that passes for enlightened teaching among us".[22]

New Testament scholarship had potentially more repercussions than Old Testament study. Academics were wary of publishing findings which could unsettle the broader social fabric.[23] In 1901 Nicoll wrote to Denney with the warning that, "Men ought to know what is at stake in these controversies". Recent academic contentions that Christ was not sinless; that he was fanatical; accused by his conscience and given to moods of despair, seemed to Nicoll to be extremely dangerous. He warned, "if you...think that Christianity will survive in any form after these admissions, you are entirely mistaken. The Old Testament business is different...The historical Jesus Christ is the article of a standing or falling Christianity".[24] Even the progressive John Clifford was awake to the vacuum left by the decline in evangelical certainty. In The Demands of the Twentieth Century he argued that the chief intellectual task of Christianity was "the reconstruction of our theology in the light" of recent Biblical research as men and women of intellect were leaving the churches, saturated as they were, "with the survivals of a partial, inconclusive, and ill-adapted

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[22] Nicoll to Peake, 4th February, 1898, Darlow, op.cit., p.345.

[23] Chadwick, op.cit., pp.72-73.

[24] Nicoll to Denney, 14th February, 1901, Darlow, op.cit., p.349.

theology".[25]

The breakdown of Evangelical protestantism was largely the result of two theological shifts, both affecting the way in which Nonconformists perceived their role within society. The first was a reassessment of the merciful nature of God. The traditional belief in Hell and eternal damnation seemed incongruous with mercy and as a result the concept of everlasting punishment was gradually diluted. In 1874 R.W. Dale suggested that the wicked were exterminated, not subjected to an eternity of suffering.[26] This represented, according to Hilton, a "failure of middle-class nerve.." But he adds, "In abolishing Hell, the middle and upper classes were also removing a justification for their own material advantages".[27] This indefiniteness about the erstwhile certainties of damnation and therefore salvation encouraged a more merciful earthly judgement of those destined for destruction.[28]

Central to all Evangelical faiths was a belief in the primacy of the Cross. Atonement through the death of Christ lay at the heart of Nonconformists' confidence in their own salvation. Boyd Hilton's periodisation of nineteenth century religion dates the demise of the age of Atonement from 1850; this was followed by a period of Incarnational optimism and individualism which lasted until

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[25] J.Clifford, The Demands of the Twentieth Century, London, 1900, pp.15-16, in Watts, op.cit,. p.438.

[26] Helmstadter, op.cit., p.159.

[27] B.Hilton, Atonement, p.276.

[28] Helmstadter, op.cit., p.158-9.

the early 1880s.[29] Scientific treatment of the Bible undermined concentration on specific acts of God which could not be authenticated. It became important to see God in as well as above the world.[30] In 1885 Drummond explained in the Expositor that:

> The evidence for Christianity is a *Christian.* The unit of physics is the atom, of biology the cell, of philosophy the man, of theology the Christian. The natural man, his regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the spiritual man and his relations to the world and to God, these are the modern facts for a scientific theology.[31]

In place of His death, Christ's birth became pivotal for many Free Churchmen. The singular significance of the Crucifixion and Resurrection was gradually undermined. Many believers began to shrink from the idea that God had literally inflicted pain on his son.[32] God's example had become more important than his sacrifice and this forced believers to emulate the life of Christ in their works and actions rather than contemplating it introspectively. Incarnationism weakened Evangelicalism, eroding solid directives on right and wrong and blurring the concept of wickedness. An espousal of mercy by Evangelicals played havoc with their traditional faith. Helmstadter has also suggested that it signalled the end of Nonconformist

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[29] B.Hilton, Atonement, passim.

[30] Chadwick, op.cit., p.31.

[31] Expositor, Third series, vol.i, in Smith, Drummond, p.228.

[32] Hilton, in Bentley, op.cit., p.35.

confidence and a fascination with failure.[33]

Nicoll remained a firm believer in the primacy of the Cross.[34] The British Weekly held that the Atonement had been "mightily confirmed by increased knowledge and riper thought". It conceded that there had been a move away from the doctrine but argued, "there will be, and there is already, a return to the deep and vital essence of Evangelicalism".[35] Nicoll did not welcome the apparent shift in Nonconformity to an acceptance of justification by works. In 1894 he wrote to Denney, "I am thinking a good deal about Justification by Faith. The doctrine is as good as ever, but it wants restating, for I think we are getting away from it".[36] Nevertheless he was influenced by the effects of theological shifts and accepted an interventionist interpretation of Christian behaviour. Nicoll wanted to find a middle path between spiritual and physical Christianity which would strengthen rather than shake the faith of the "ordinary" believer.

The unpredicted success of Mrs Humphry Ward's Robert Elsmere in 1888 was testimony to the fact that Christianity was in transition. The novel was an exploration of Mrs Ward's personal reservations about orthodox religions and

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[33] Helmstadter, op.cit., pp.159-61.

[34] This can be explained in part by Inglis's view, "It was a common and reasonable feeling among Nonconformists that they owed too much to the evangelical revival to tolerate any disloyalty to it." K.S.Inglis, "English Nonconformity and Social Reform, 1880-1900," Past and Present, Volume 13, 1958, p.84.

[35] British Weekly, 1st February 1889.

[36] Nicoll to Denney, 2nd March, 1894, in Darlow, op.cit., p.340.

offered a new theology, religious humanism which was a replacement for Christianity. Benjamin Jowett suggested that "its success is really due to its saying what everybody else is thinking".[37] The British Weekly rejoined, "Plenty of people believe that the demolition of Christianity is merely an affair of books, and squires and German professors - in sufficient quantity".[38] Robert Elsmere received favourable reviews in the Manchester Guardian and Pall Mall Gazette whereas the Times and London Quarterly Review attacked it for its abuse of revealed religion.[39] Gladstone explained to Lord Acton that, "Robert Elsmere, who has been a parish clergyman, is upset entirely, as it appears, by the difficulty of accepting miracles, and by the suggestion that the existing Christianity grew up in an age specially predisposed to them".[40] Gladstone's reaction to the novel, published in the Nineteenth Century in May, inadvertently assured the book's international success - despite his contention that Robert Elsmere was an ill informed critique of contemporary Christianity. The British Weekly concluded:

> The problem of constructing Christianity minus the miraculous is not new. It has occupied minds

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[37] W.S.Peterson, Victorian Heretic Mrs Humphry Ward's "Robert Elsmere", Leicester 1976, p.160.

[38] British Weekly, 9th March 1886.

[39] Peterson, op.cit., pp.171-172. Peterson has included a rather misleading extract from the British Weekly review which suggested a very positive response from the newspaper, Peterson, op.cit., p.170.

[40] Gladstone to Acton, 1st April 1888, in Morley, Gladstone, Vol.II, p.448.

> as wise and keen as Mrs. Ward's for many years. Mrs. Ward has done her best. She has invented a new benediction and - this is no doubt a very great stretch - a new sacrament...Catherine Elsmere chose the better part when she still looked to Jesus...Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross...By this Christ, and no other, are souls ruled and saved.[41]

ii. T.H. Green and the Adaptation of Liberalism:

Mrs Ward's work in 1888 added notoriety to the Idealist philosopher T.H. Green on whom she had based one of her characters. This, along with the publication of his collected works, brought Green's philosophy to a wider public.[42] The Idealist concept of a shared moral value system was appealing to a middle class which had been left somewhat bewildered by the intellectual debates of theologians in the second half of the nineteenth century. In language and nature Green's message was easily recognised by middle class churchgoers. The missionary nature of Positivism helped to fill the void left by the lessening influence of theological Evangelicalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It also provided a

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[41] British Weekly, 9th March 1888. In November 1889 the British Weekly also carried a piece by Sir Alfred Dale on Robert Elsmere which concluded, "The most ruinous, the most hopeless of all delusions, is to suppose that the soul's inner life can be sustained or strengthened on such fare as this; that doubts when they rise, can be laid by these short and easy methods." This was reprinted in the British Weekly twenty-five year anniversary edition, 7th December 1911. In this year also Mrs Humphry Ward wrote to Nicoll remembering, "the fair and kindly review of Robert Elsmere." Darlow, op.cit., p.86. Darlow does not make any connection with the publication of that year.

[42] M. Richter, the Politics of Conscience: T.H.Green and his Age, London, 1964, p.294.

welcome intellectual response to secularism. Green offered the religious community a philosophy which was essentially Christian. In a time when this was increasingly unfashionable, Idealism made "Christianity at once rational and defensible".[43]

Green had a captive audience among disillusioned Liberals and anxious Nonconformists. His message offered a plausible moral utopia. The conviction that the working classes and landed classes could be imbued with the virtues of their capitalist, Christian, middle class counterparts was in itself appealing. Green's philosophy coincided with the changes in Protestantism which laid less emphasis on the individual and on personal salvation and more on community work. Idealism also tapped many of the inclinations of traditional radicalism with its advocacy of social reform. It was a rationalisation of the moral duty of each member of society to contribute to the whole. Green provided the doorway into responsible, interventionist government using the terms of reference of traditional Radicals and the language of morality. Much of Green's success was due to the fact that he was faced with a Liberal party and religious community which were in need of intellectual rejuvenation.

In the Contemporary Review in 1888 R.B. Haldane expressed his concern for the party's lack of leadership. He did not blame commitment to Home Rule for the apparent Liberal decline since 1885, but was concerned with the long term ability of the Liberal party to maintain its middle

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[43] Vincent and Plant, op.cit., p.8.

class support. Haldane urged the Liberal party to define clearly its agenda fearing that the indefiniteness of the Liberal programme would lose crucial middle class support to the Unionists.[44] He warned, "political leaders should lead and not follow, and...it should be made plain that programmes as that of Mr. Henry George form no part of the policy of the Liberal party".[45] The problem was also apparent to those outwith the Liberal party. In 1889 Charles Cooper challenged Lord Rosebery, "You say you have confidence in your party, which is your party? Is it Mr. Gladstone, or Mr. Labouchere? There is no Liberal party that would not go to pieces in a week if the shadow of Mr. Gladstone's umbrella were withdrawn from it".[46]

Idealist ethics had been instructing the values of Oxford undergraduates for more than twenty years when they were popularized at the end of the 1880s. At this time Green's former students, such as H.H. Asquith, and adherents like R.B. Haldane were just beginning their parliamentary careers.[47] Positivism helped the Liberal party to define the role of the state in a way which provided the party with a more persuasive and realistic

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[44] R.B.Haldane, "The Liberal Party and its Prospects," Contemporary Review, Volume III, January 1888, p.148.

[45] R.B.Haldane, "The Liberal Party and its Prospects," pp.148-149.

[46] Cooper to Rosebery, 24th May 1889, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10010, f.195.

[47] Asquith wrote in his autobiography, "Between 1870 and 1880 Green was undoubtedly the greatest force in the real life of Oxford. For myself, though I owe more than I can say to Green's gymnastics, both intellectual and moral, I never "worshipped at the Temple's inner shrine." H.H.Asquith, Memoirs and Reflections, 1852-1927, Vol.I, London, 1928, p.19.

agenda for the emerging democracy. For the immediate followers of T.H. Green individualism represented ultimate personal freedom. They saw their task as the creation of a social ethos which would make individualism moral and meaningful. Intrinsically freedom equalled the realization of potential. In theory the core aim of Idealist philosophy was to bridge the gap between the actual and the potential self. Desirable citizens had a self respect which was bound to a respect for all people. In real terms the model for the fully realised citizen resembled a nonconformist, middle class ideal of the educated, diligent and thrifty teetotaller.[48]

The Positivist utopia was dependent upon individual freedom of choice. Ideally it was hoped that working class citizens, given the benefit of education and economic freedom would make choices in the spirit of Green's new morality. In order to begin this process it was necessary to free all citizens from the form of poverty which left them perpetually anxious about satisfying their basic need for food and shelter. Release from this rather primitive state would assist the elevation of the poor to an intellectually and morally fulfilling level. This required a two pronged attack on the educational and financial standards of the working class. But it was difficult to clarify the minimum standard of living. Theoretically it was a level at which the population could be released from the insecurity of poverty. Green defined it as a state in which citizens could realize their true potential. He

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[48] Richter, op.cit., pp.328-329.

believed that:

> It is the business of the state, not indeed directly to promote moral goodness for that, from the very nature of moral goodness, it cannot do, but to maintain the conditions without which a free exercise of the human faculties is impossible.[49]

Haldane's aspiration for the Liberal party was a version of Green's Idealism. It was free of dogmatism and relied on the understanding that the state had far reaching responsibility for its citizens. He contended that:

> ...the Liberal party has accomplished the main part of what it has to do in the way of establishing mere freedom of interference for the individual. It has now to win for him the conditions of freedom in a more subtle and far reaching sense, of the freedom from that ignorance and the unnatural lowness of moral and social idea which are promoted by the bad surroundings amid which too many of our fellow-countrymen are born and grow up.[50]

iii. Nonconformity, the Labour Movement and Social Reform:

The moral obligations which Green had outlined for both state and citizen informed the Liberal conscience and its Nonconformist extension. The social and economic revelations of the late 1880s and 1890s in the form of labour unrest and studies by Mearns, Booth and Rowntree also prevented many ministers from remaining deaf to the

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[49] The Works of T.H.Green, Volume III, edited by R.L.Nettleship, p.372, in Richter, op.cit., pp.283-284.

[50] Haldane, "Liberal Party and its Prospects," p.155.

questions of economic inequality and deprivation. The Forward Movement, of which Huge Price Hughes was an important member was inspired by The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, and this work was also significant in the political awakening of John Clifford.[51]

Nonconformist bodies in the shape of the Wesleyan Conference and the Congregational Union had no official mechanisms to deal with the developing interest in social reform. In 1885 the Wesleyan Conference first addressed the problem of urban poverty, vaguely suggesting a more "practical interest" from Methodists in the "domestic and social well being" of the poor. This interest was developed and continued into the next century, albeit with occasional Conferences reviving the Evangelical notion that saving souls was the only way to exorcise the evils of society.

The Congregational Union was similarly timid in its acceptance of social reform. It was in fact concern about religious indifference which led Congregationalists to increase their involvement with the working class. The Social Questions Committee was formed in 1892 and it developed communications with Labour leaders. In this year Keir Hardie addressed the Congregational Union at Bradford and the ensuing debate prompted the setting up of a conference between Congregationalist and Labour M.P.s. This in turn roused the Congregational Union to the need for a more practical and specific approach to working class

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[51] E.R.Norman, The Victorian Christian Socialists, Cambridge, 1987, p.146, Watts, op.cit., p.102.

hardship. The momentum which gathered allowed the assembly of the Congregational Union to pass a resolution in 1894 which stated that "the rights of humanity must always take precedence over the rights of property".[52] The following year however a conference of clergy and ministers was held to discuss the labour question during the coal strike. The British Weekly reported that, "the speakers were at sixes and sevens, and the Dean [of Westminster] declined to commit the meeting to any definite resolution. The proceedings were a sad fiasco".[53]

Political involvement was not straightforward for the Free Churches as it was often associated with secularization. In 1894 Dr. Barrett the new minister of Clapton Park and chairman of the Congregational May Meetings warned against the preoccupation of the pulpit with material, temporal and intellectual issues in place of those "eternal verities which Christ [had] commissioned his ministers to proclaim". Dr. Barrett disagreed with the view that the main aim of religious groups should be to secure the basis for good wages, equal rights and temporal goods or to save the body from suffering. He wanted churches to remember that these things were only a means to an end. "It may be our duty," he argued, "to create the atmosphere, the sympathy, the public opinion, which will tend to bring these things about, but a changed environment will not make a changed man". Barrett voiced the widespread anxiety within the Nonconformist community that

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[52] K.S.Inglis, "English Nonconformity, pp.77-78.

[53] British Weekly, 16th November 1893.

due to their interest in social and political issues ministers would forget that their first duty was saving the soul from sin. The British Weekly concurred with Barrett's position, concluding, "A secular pulpit means a pagan society".[54]

Cooperation with the Labour movement added a new dimension to the social reform debate. Acceptance of extensive government intervention was the thin end of a dangerous wedge. The development of elements of the Idealist philosophy into a justification of Socialistic measures was in some ways a natural process. Nonconformists did not come from a tradition of moderation. Their "conscience" politics of the nineteenth century had taught them that political rights were moral rights; immediate and absolute. The terms of the Nonconformist political debates over slavery, the Corn Laws and Disestablishment had indicated that they would not compromise their beliefs on a moral issue. Hughes' pronouncement on the Parnell affair exhibited the standard rhetoric of the Nonconformist conscience: what was morally wrong could never be politically right. Once the moral duty of governments to intervene in social and economic affairs had been conceded, Nonconformists had to decide where the line should be drawn.

Many ministers who worked in inner city areas embraced the idea of Socialism. Some like Dr. Leach, a London Congregational minister, supported the Independent Labour Party and felt that this connection made no difference to

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[54] British Weekly, 10th May 1894.

his preaching, "except that it makes it more than ever evangelical, for Jesus Christ is more real to me as the Saviour of men than ever before".[55] Others maintained a suspicion of government handouts. It has been suggested that Socialism was a more divisive issue for Nonconformists than either Home Rule or the Boer War.[56] While this may exaggerate the impact of the Socialist debate, the Nonconformist community could certainly find no unity on the question.

Those who called themselves Christian Socialists often (like Hugh Price Hughes) drew a distinction between the secular Socialism of Europe and one which could be accommodated within the Liberal party. Hughes was a Gladstonian Liberal whose wife sat on the Executive Committee of the Women's Liberal Federation.[57] In response to the formation of the Independent Labour Party, another Christian Socialist, John Clifford argued that there was, "no help for the country at large but in a purified and extended Liberalism, and to attack Liberalism was not only ungrateful, but impolitic".[58] Although Christian Socialism was not revolutionary, its emphasis on materialistic reform did represent a danger to more traditional Nonconformists.

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[55] Leach believed that the I.L.P. should ally with which ever party was practical. He agreed with Home Rule and Disestablishment but wondered at their benefit for unemployed skilled artisans. British Weekly, 1st November 1894.

[56] J.F.Glaser, "English Nonconformity and the Decline of Liberalism," American Historical Review, lxiii, 1957-8, pp.352-363.

[57] Norman, op.cit., p.155, p.151.

[58] New Age, 1st November 1894, in Watts, op.cit., p.245.

Clifford committed to his diary a deep impression of, "the need for more attention to the *social* problems of the day. Churches should have social missionaries attached to them...Workers should be trained who should not be *theological*. The Church has made too much of theology".[59] Clifford concurred with Stead that the supreme test of religious belief was the Biblical text, "By their fruits ye shall know them".[60]

Despite very conservative Evangelical beliefs Nicoll had not been unaffected by the debate surrounding the responsibility of the State. The British Weekly supported Clifford's view in The New City of God that, "Christians are sacredly bound to take a deep concern in the social problems of the time". Nevertheless it did not want to see God lost in the search for the new city.[61] Clifford failed to resolve the central dilemma for Christian Socialists: if the state is made responsible for the implementation of the social gospel, the Church becomes redundant.[62] The British Weekly was certainly aware of the danger and feared that Christianity might be lost in Price Hughes' Social Christianity. It praised the volume but would "have liked to read more about the Atonement".[63]

Nicoll's newspaper supported the need for social

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[59] J.Marchant, Dr. John Clifford C.H: life, letters and reminiscences, London, 1924, pp.81-82.

[60] W.T.Stead, Centres of Spiritual Activity, London, 1886, p.iv, in Watts, op.cit., p.196.

[61] British Weekly, 12th October 1888.

[62] Watts, op.cit., p.180.

[63] British Weekly, 15th March 1889.

reform but ultimately it argued that only the transformation of the soul could effect the transformation of the world.[64] The British Weekly noted that leaders of the social reform movement had turned their backs on Christ although they taught doctrines which came directly from Him. But it continued:

> We are persuaded that as social reformers go on they will perceive that their ideals are not worth pursuit if they transform conditions without transforming men - and that even the transformation of circumstances cannot be attained without civil war. Then it is for Christianity to step in. Through the power of Christ the miracle of moral renewal is still accomplished.[65]

Nevertheless the British Weekly was nervous of the increasing moral credibility of unbelievers. In 1888 it commented on the "ominous fact" that the champion of the match girls' struggle, Mrs. Besant, was a prominent anti-Christian. It warned:

> while these social reformers will work with us up to a certain point, let it be remembered that they will have nothing to do with Christianity...In short, we cannot go far in co-operating with them without becoming accomplices in the repudiation of the revealed will of Jesus Christ.[66]

Nicoll was concerned by the "heathenish manner in which certain Nonconformist "Settlements" [were] carried

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[64] British Weekly, 12th October 1888.

[65] British Weekly, 1st February 1889.

[66] British Weekly, 12th October 1888.

on. There is..." he complained, "a certain pretence of Christian teaching, but what is taught is not Christianity. No heart is thrown into it and no interest is taken. On the other hand, people are got through socialism, waxworks, magic lanterns, and the like. But it is not the way that our Churches have lived or can possibly live".[67] Even those who rejected the intrinsic link between religion and morality were confronted with a lack of interest. Mrs. Ward's social regenerationist instinct was disappointed in University Hall which revealed a greater interest among its clients for social work than new theology.[68]

In January 1894 Professor Marcus Dods opened a debate on Socialism in the British Weekly's "Young Men's Page". Dods introduced a tentative Nonconformist line, arguing that Socialism, despite its press, was not necessarily evil. Like all political labels Socialism is a multitudinous term and support or opposition was largely dependent on individual interpretation. Dods described Socialists as supporters of nationalisation of land and capital who believed that the "state shall pluck up the present industrial system by the roots, abolish the competitive system, and regulate labour in its hours, its renumeration, its relation to capital and in everything connected with it". In criticism, Dods contended that industry without competition was not viable. He argued that while both Christianity and Socialism preached gospels

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[67] Nicoll to Professor Peake, 4th February 1898, in Darlow, op.cit., p.345.

[68] P.Clark, Liberals and Social Democrats, p.17.

for the poor, the latter was a creed of coercion while Christianity involved the regeneration of society through the voluntary goodness of individuals. Dods concluded:

> State regulation may play the part of a plaster-of-Paris jacket, and in our present shattered condition may serve to hold society together, till the body gains strength and the bond of life renews itself.[69]

The debate which followed involved commissioned articles and readers' letters. It revealed a great breadth of opinion and no uniform definition of Socialism. On 18th January Keir Hardie offered his response to the confusion. Hardie's language was familiar to British Weekly readers. His Socialism was informed by his deep religious belief.[70] He claimed that Socialism offered the human heart love, brotherliness, sympathy and justice. However while Positivists tried to "moralise the competitive society of capitalism"[71] Hardie contended that the intrinsic nature of capitalism was unethical and his aim was to overthrow it, not make it virtuous. The crux of Hardie's message to British Weekly readers was that Socialism was the embodiment of Christianity in the industrial system. "The underlying cause of every evil we suffer from to-day is that individuals gain by the sacrifices of the community. Socialism would make this impossible". This appealed to the Christian conscience and drew upon Idealist recognition

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[69] British Weekly, 4th January 1894.

[70] K.O.Morgan, Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist, London, 1975, p.9.

[71] Richter, op.cit., p.290.

of community rights and the danger of rampant and thoughtless individual aggrandizement. To those Nonconformists who avoided controversy by saying Socialism was an economic issue, Hardie replied; "I dispute altogether the statement that the question is one for the economists. Like everything else which concerns the human family, it is primarily a question of morals".[72]

By making Socialism a "question of morals" rather than economics or politics Hardie was forcing Nonconformists to take a side. His effectiveness was also dependent on Nonconformist awareness that their political and social influence would be diminished if they did not enter the debate. Still many Nonconformists found it difficult to reconcile the very material nature of the debate over social and economic reform with the spirituality of Christianity. They believed that concentration on these issues was anti- Christian, little more than "quarrels about the meat". Others felt that the debate itself was a vital part of the movement towards a Christian society.[73]

In June 1894 the British Weekly reviewed "The Incarnation and Common Life" by Dr. Westcott, the Bishop of Durham, and provided an editorial slant to the Socialist question. It accepted that Christianity and Socialism shared much common ground and concurred with Dr. Wescott's argument that Socialism was not only a theory of economics but also a theory of life and this made it part and parcel of Christianity: "that all men are "one man" in Christ,

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[72] British Weekly, 18th January 1894.

[73] British Weekly, 1st March 1894.

sons of God and brethren suffering and rejoicing together, that each touches all and all touch each other with an inevitable influence..." But the British Weekly would not concede that a Christian must be a Socialist. The editor argued that Socialism was a theory of life which was also a theory of economics; and one which claimed to be the final and perfect theory:

> And Christianity per se does not tell us whether this or that theory of economics will work out in the way we expect or desire. Christianity, for example, teaches us to pay our debts, but it does not teach us whether our bills are added up correctly. Christianity teaches us the brotherhood of man; but it does not teach us whether the brotherhood of man can best be realized by nationalising all the instruments of production. That problem is surely one whose very terms cannot be grasped without some preliminary economic training; certainly it is a problem on which the holiest saints may hold quite opposite opinions.

In response to the frequent argument that the nature of Christianity dictated that Christians should be Socialists the British Weekly inverted the challenge and argued that Socialists should be Christians. The Leader stated that Socialism was totally dependent on the spirit of Christianity for the practical application of a cooperating brotherhood: "To gain and to keep any change worth having, you must kindle that unselfish passion which has never been energetic among masses of unchristian men". The British Weekly concluded:

> We believe most firmly...that the social question of our day will finally receive not one answer, but many. But in one respect all the answers

will agree; all will be religious.[74]

A "religious" system was not necessarily Christian. Theories such as Idealism and Socialism could provide an alternative belief system and as the British Weekly observed, they relied on the acceptance of an unselfishness which in Britain was associated with Christianity. If Socialism could be presented as neo Christian, then Robert Elsmere had shown there was room for an alternative to traditional Christian moralism. John Morley, George Eliot and Leslie Stephen were some of the more prominent unbelievers who attempted to prove that morality was not reliant on Christianity.[75] In 1891 the British Weekly had taken the occasion of Charles Dilke's threatened return to Parliament to note the signs that, "the party of religion without theology and morality without commandments [was] increasing among Liberals".[76]

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century the zeal which socialism excited in its followers was similar to that inspired in Christian disciples. Many converts described their experience in terms of a religious conversion and the language of the movement emphasised the sacrificial nature of commitment. Even those like William Morris, who were opposed to religion borrowed words like "evangelist," "disciple" and "gospel" from the Christian

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[74] British Weekly, 7th June 1894.

[75] Chadwick, op.cit., p.119.

[76] British Weekly, 16th April 1891.

tradition.[77] Socialism offered its followers a meta-narrative to rival theological explanations and gave them a sense of mission. Some like Graham Wallas came to dislike the word Socialist because it was identified with "a cut-and-dried formula held with theological fervour".[78] Alternatively Hardie's Socialism was inextricably bound to his Christian faith. He told the Congregational Union that:

> they in the Labour Movement had come to resuscitate the Christianity of Christ, to go back to the time when the poor should have good news preached to them, and the Gospel should be good news of joy and happiness in life.[79]

Political success was dependent on the capture of the middle ground. The adoption by Socialists of a high minded, religious tone (rather than one of class conflict) was the most effective way of gaining middle class confidence. However Nicoll was loathe to support a political system which was not necessarily underpinned by Christianity. The expansion of democracy was removing the strength of chapel in politics. Nonconformists did not have the leverage on the Socialist movement which they felt they had on Liberalism.

Nicoll's claim that he could not urge Christians to be

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[77] S.Yeo, "A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896," History Workshop, Issue 4, Autumn 1977, p.11, p.16, p.17.

[78] B.Webb, The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Volume Two, 1892-1905, London, 1983, p.81.

[79] The Labour Prophet, November 1892, in Morgan, Kier Hardie, p.63.

Socialists because it was a matter for those with economic training was disingenuous. His involvement in the New Liberal debate and more specifically his support for Lloyd George's Land Campaign in 1913 indicated that Nicoll was prepared to be a polemicist without economic training when it suited his political instincts. Nicoll simply did not like the implications of Socialism. In 1886 the British Weekly took issue with the nature of Socialism because it did not differentiate between the deserving and non-deserving poor; believing that, "when vice brings poverty, its sting is remedial". Nicoll did not want the Church to interfere with Providence. The British Weekly's solution was to have the Church instruct people in prudence, temperance and laws of life while guiding employers towards justice and righteousness.[80]

This position allowed the newspaper to have a degree of sympathy with those taking industrial action. It was always important to the British Weekly to attempt a degree of empathy with workers: it was part of the process of keeping Labour under Liberal/Free Church influence. Like the majority of Nonconformists, the British Weekly was initially asleep to the significance of the London Dock Strike of 1889. Price Hughes spoke of the fact that Free Church leaders had been shamed by Cardinal Manning and Roman Catholics who had assisted the poor in the strike from the outset.[81] Once awake to the issue, the British Weekly defended the strikers against Socialist conspiracy

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[80] British Weekly, 7th December 1886.

[81] Watts, op.cit., p.231.

cries and in September 1889 it urged Christian ministers and philanthropists to become involved. "Their function is," the newspaper argued, "in the first instance, mediatorial. But when they fail to make peace, and see on which side the blame lies, they ought to speak...What we deplore is the nerveless and cowardly apathy against which the stones are crying out".[82] Throughout the 1890s the British Weekly provided a forum for readers organizing aid for strikers. Letters asked for clothing or money for the "sober, decent, law-abiding men and women;" colliers, miners and industrial workers. It supported the right of workers to a "living wage" and concurred with the view of a speaker at Holborn Town Hall that, "Political economists will have to recognise and deal with the fact that the Christian, the religious, and the moral conscience, declines to allow men to be given a wage below that at which they can maintain a decent standard of living".[83]

Despite the recognition that strikes were a necessary evil, the British Weekly did not want to see them become a commonplace evil. It agreed with John Morley's advice to the Dockers Union in 1891 to strike only when success was likely, and to restrict action to protests on definite grounds which would carry public sympathy. The British Weekly wanted to see discipline in the Labour movement in order to alleviate strife and leave room for honourable

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[82] British Weekly, 6th September 1889.

[83] British Weekly, 7th December 1893.

reconciliation.[84] The prolonged Coal strike of 1893 prompted the British Weekly to state that, "something must be done to prevent such a state of things recurring, whether it be by creating a coal trust or in some other manner...It is not the miners merely that need to be kept in order. The mineowners need control, perhaps even more".[85]

Inherent in the concern for strikers was the fear that without the good sense of Liberal influence the Labour movement was a potentially anarchical organisation. The British Weekly was always concerned that the Liberal party should present itself as a credible representative of all classes. In this respect it was in tune with the Roseberian section of the Liberal party which saw the Trade Unions as a means of "encouraging the working classes to provide for their own necessities", in a way which saved the Liberal party from having to intervene on their behalf.[86] The British Weekly prompted its middle class readership towards qualified sympathy for the Trades Unions and hoped to harness the Labour movement to the Liberal party. Fear of Socialism was presented as one reason for these aspirations. The British Weekly depicted the outcome of the 1893 coal strike as a victory for the new democracy. It warned, "To the new democracy Liberals and Conservatives are practically the same...The masses are beginning to know

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[84] British Weekly, 8th October 1891.

[85] British Weekly, 28th September 1893.

[86] Haldane in the Lothians, Scotsman, 12th October 1905, in H.C.G.Matthew, The Liberal Imperialists: the ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian elite, Oxford 1973, p.245.

that the power is with them..."[87]

In reality the debate over the moral rights and wrongs of Socialism remained an abstract conundrum for the majority of Nonconformist Liberals. Although it appeared as a potential threat in the 1880s, by the next decade the Labour movement was still largely dependent on the Liberal party as its political wing; prompting the view that the majority of New Liberals were non-Socialist rather than anti-Socialist.[88] This absence of antagonism suggests they did not perceive the Left as an overt and immediate threat. Fear of Socialism was manufactured by the existing political parties for their own ends.

Haldane had used the possible adoption of Socialism by the working class to argue that the Liberal party should tighten its political programme and confront the battle between capital and labour.[89] He saw the growth of a Socialist party as a sorry indictment of the failure of the Liberal party to deal with industrial friction.[90] Nicoll also portrayed Socialism as a symptom of the failure of the Liberal party to appeal to the working class. He attributed Liberal impotence to the party's concentration on Home Rule with Gladstone as an oppressive weight who

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[87] British Weekly, 23rd November 1893.

[88] Vincent and Plant, op.cit., p.46.

[89] R.B.Haldane, "The Liberal Party and its Prospects," p.152.

[90] Haldane, "Liberal Party and its Prospects," p.153.

maintained the old order.[91] In practice however the British Weekly itself remained insensitive to the issues which most concerned the working class. Its lack of interest over the Taff Vale ruling indicated that even by 1901 the British Weekly did not fully understand the Labour movement.[92]

Nevertheless in these self-consciously transitional years Nicoll was anxious that both the Church and the Liberal party should not allow themselves to become alienated by democratic forces. He worried that in the post-Gladstonian era the Church would not be seen as a just and generous advocate of the poor. In 1890 the British Weekly felt the Church stood, "arraigned by the poor of this country for not declaring the whole counsel of Christ upon wealth. And it is hard to see how she can escape a just condemnation".[93] The problem for the Liberal party, from Nicoll's point of view, was that it had failed both the poor and the Church. The British Weekly divided Liberal support into representatives of the propertied class, Nonconformists (whose ranks were sadly broken) and the masses. Of these the most important were Dissenters and democracy. The British Weekly felt that the leadership of the party had fallen into the hands of the least important group; "weakened hands" who as a rule had "no particle of sympathy either with Nonconformity or with Labour". In short the Liberal leadership consisted of:

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[91] British Weekly, 12th September 1890.

[92] British Weekly, 5th September 1901.

[93] British Weekly, 12th September 1890.

> ...capitalists, London clubmen, superior persons, and as a rule Churchmen or Agnostics. In not a few cases they are ex Dissenters. They pride themselves on their superiority to their allies, of whom they are just a trifle ashamed, and they consider that these allies should be very thankful that they have such representatives to direct their affairs. In consequence of this many sections of the Liberal party have become disheartened.[94]

The British Weekly wrote this Leader in support of the Liberal party's decision to meet with Labour representatives at Sheffield. It was strongly in favour of close cooperation between the two parties. It had accepted the results of the 1894 Leicester election as proof of the strength of the I.L.P. and challenged the view of the Speaker which maintained that the Labour party was still a negligible threat. The British Weekly claimed that the unofficial Liberal press was fully aware of the seriousness of the political situation. It argued that during Gladstone's lifetime there was no hope of Liberal / Liberal Unionist alliance, therefore the best way to defeat the Tories was an alliance between Liberals, Home Rulers and Labour. Nicoll no doubt felt that reliance on the Labour party would dilute the influence of the Irish and refocus concentration on domestic reform. He urged the Liberals to implement the Newcastle Programme along with some measures which would appease Labour.[95] The British Weekly also wanted to see a firm commitment by the Liberal party to Disestablishment, in recognition of the importance of its

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[94] British Weekly, 20th September 1894.

[95] British Weekly, 6th September 1894.

Nonconformist support. It suggested that this might lure Nonconformist Unionists into returning to the Liberal party and underlined the necessity of the Liberal party adopting a "vigorous and intelligent policy" which would pre-empt Tory rule into the Twentieth century.[96]

iv. Nonconformity and the Roseberian Section:

Nicoll's preoccupation with the representation of Nonconformity in the Liberal party made him less keen to overturn the old order completely but he was also a pragmatist, and in time recognised the redundant nature of Newcastle Radicalism. The Roseberian critique rooted the Liberal party's failure to present itself as the national party in the middle ground support lost in 1886 and in the subsequent domination of the party by faddists.[97] Nicoll was a cautious supporter of the post-Gladstonian regime and the British Weekly supported Rosebery's leadership.[98] Jane Stoddart was an avowed devotee of the Earl and wrote a flattering piece in the wake of Gladstone's resignation. She contended that from 1886-1892 Rosebery "did more to help on the Liberal cause than all the other Cabinet ministers put together".[99]

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[96] British Weekly, 20th September 1894.

[97] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.130.

[98] British Weekly, 8th March 1894.

[99] British Weekly, 8th March 1894. In her autobiography Jane Stoddart recorded, "All that Gladstone had been to the parents, Lord Rosebery was to the children. We saw in him, quite

The British Weekly was unable to match Stoddart's enthusiasm. In May it criticised Rosebery's threat of resignation as the threat of a pouting child, and at the end of the Parliamentary session highlighted Rosebery's failure to justify the expectations entertained of him. Specifically the British Weekly referred to his lack of tact and ability.[100] As always however the test was Rosebery's incomplete understanding of the Disestablishment question.[101] The House of Lords threatened to become the issue of the hour as Rosebery and his followers hoped it would provide a post-Gladstonian focus on which the party could fight the next election.[102] The British Weekly accepted the need for change but feared that, "the premature engagement in a battle with the House of Lords would postpone indefinitely those measures to which the Government stand committed".[103]

By the 1895 General Election Nicoll had become an established representative of the Liberal Free Churches. He had a seat on the platform of the Albert Hall in July when Liberal leaders addressed the party.[104] Later that month James Denney wrote, "I congratulate you, in spite of the result of the elections, on the place you have made for

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literally, the hope of the future". Stoddart, Harvest Years, p.31. Stoddart also compiled The Earl of Rosebery K.G. An Illustrated Biography, London, 1900.

[100] British Weekly, 31st May 1894, 23rd August 1894.

[101] British Weekly, 17th January 1895, 24th January 1895.

[102] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.138.

[103] British Weekly, 23rd August 1894.

[104] Stoddart, Harvest Years, p.99.

the British Weekly in the political as well as the religious world".[105] In a plea to Liberal Unionists, Nicoll used this influence to urge Nonconformists to put Church matters before Home Rule.[106]

The Liberal party itself faced the electorate in a state of disarray. Harcourt prioritised Local Veto, Morley Home Rule and Rosebery the House of Lords.[107] The British Weekly interpreted the Liberal defeat as a resounding indictment of the prominence given to the divisive policy of Home Rule. It also pointed to the failure of the Liberal party to pick up on the working class vote and the alienation of Dissent. To those who blamed Local Option for the loss of votes, the British Weekly countered that if the complicated policy had been presented in a more positive way it need not have been a liability.[108]

The Roseberians within the party made a different diagnosis. They believed that Gladstone had left the party hampered by its association with sectional interests; "a Welsh-Irish, Dilke and Stanhope foundation," as it appeared to Perks.[109] At Scarborough in the autumn Rosebery asserted that if liberalism "could only appeal to one part

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[105] Stoddart, Harvest Years, p.95.

[106] British Weekly, 4th July 1895.

[107] P.Stansky, Ambitions and Strategies: the struggle for the leadership of the Liberal party in the 1890s, Oxford, 1964, p.176.

[108] British Weekly, 25th July 1895.

[109] Perks to Rosebery, 8th October 1896. Perks wanted the Scottish Liberals and English Nonconformists to hold together to find freedom from the Liberal - Irish alliance. Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.6.

nation...it must lose its qualification...for what...it has always been and must really be...the national party".[110] This was at odds with what the British Weekly wanted from the party. It criticised the speech because Rosebery "practically avoided reference to any particular measures," and blamed the Liberal party for taking Scottish and Welsh voters for granted.[111] The British Weekly accepted that the Liberal party had been compelled to reduce its programme to a few items but argued that to reduce this any further would be "fatal" electorally.[112] Conversely Roseberians hoped to unite the party behind a "general agreement about a common approach to politics" rather than a specific ideological programme.[113]

The introduction of the abortive Education Bill on 31st March 1896 confirmed Nicoll's move to the Roseberian section. The failure of the Irish M.P.s to support the Nonconformists in their opposition to the Bill brought the warning from the British Weekly that, "Those who claim autonomy of themselves should be ready to grant it to others. The Irishmen in their present action are false not only to their friends, but to their principles".[114] A month

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[110] Times, 19th October 1895, in Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.127.

[111] British Weekly, 24th October 1895.

[112] British Weekly, 24th October 1895.

[113] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.139.

[114] British Weekly, 23rd April 1896. In March Robert Perks had told the British Weekly, "English Nonconformists who have sacrificed so much, who have allowed their party to be rent in two, who have severed private friendships and almost forced Home Rule on many constituencies, will not forgive such treachery as this." 5th March 1896.

later the Nonconformist community declared the Home Rule alliance dead, the Irish having proved themselves instruments of the Roman Catholic Church. The British Weekly concurred that the Free Churches' selfless commitment to Gladstonian Home Rule had expired.[115] Rosebery was presented as the politician who represented most accurately the position of Nonconformists.[116] Whether or not Rosebery had a comprehensive understanding of the educational issues it was important that his brand of Liberalism represented a way of superseding Home Rule while remaining within the Liberal party.

Furthermore the close relationship between Rosebery and Perks suggested to Nonconformists that the former was amenable to their specific needs. It seemed that Dissenters finally had the ear of a Liberal leader and Perks was keen to promote this view. In November 1896 he wrote of his attempts to convince Price Hughes that Rosebery was not attempting to free the Liberal party from the "undue control of the religious communities," as John Morley had suggested.[117] The following year Perks confessed, "Personally I don't care to see our party back in office unless we come in quite independent of the Irish vote". He reported that he was, "trying to do a little [to see the Liberals back into office] - by organising the

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[115] British Weekly, 14th May 1896.

[116] Robert Perks in the British Weekly, 5th March 1896.

[117] Perks told Hughes that he was being "innocently used as the Tool of a group of dissolute infidels". Hughes replied that Perks, Fowler and other weak minded people had come under the "glamour of [Rosebery's] personal influence". Perks to Rosebery, 5th November 1896, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.8.

Eastern Counties Federation, by influencing certain journals, and by getting the Nonconformist Churches more closely into line".[118]

In a speech at Marshchapel in January 1898 Perks argued that the Liberal party should, "candidly recognise that they cannot hope to carry Home Rule," and end the "disastrous Liberal alliance" with Mr. Redmond. He urged the leadership to state that if re-elected they would not try to set up an independent Parliament or executive in Ireland or endow a Roman Catholic University. Perks reminded his audience that, "The Irish Party handed over the Nonconformist children in British elementary schools to the tender mercies of the Anglican clergy".[119] He sent Rosebery a report of the speech enclosed with extracts from the British Weekly and Methodist Times, newspapers which he believed to be "true exponents of Nonconformist opinion".[120]

The British Weekly praised the "manly and statesmanlike speech," which put forward views familiar to its readers: that the Home Rule - Nonconformist alliance was over and that for every Irish vote forfeited by the Liberals, they would receive one from those torn between the Liberal and Unionist camps. The Methodist Times reiterated its view that when Dillon announced that the

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[118] Perks to Rosebery, 30th August 1897, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS. 10050, f.12.

[119] Perks to Rosebery, January 1898, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.13a.

[120] Perks to Rosebery, 20th January 1898. The following year Perks expressed the view that the British Weekly was "by far the most able Nonconformist paper published." Perks to Rosebery, 20th May 1899, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.14, f.35.

Irish would not vote against the Education Act, Home Rule was killed. It argued for local self-government for England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The Irish had shown that they had no respect for the religious convictions of English Nonconformists and that their real aim was Irish Romanism throughout Britain.[121] In March 1898 the British Weekly interpreted the Progressive victory in the L.C.C. elections as the London working man's acceptance that the Liberal party would never again put itself under the Irish yoke. Rosebery's conspicuous intervention on behalf of the Progressives appeared to indicate that he belonged to the reforming arm of the Liberal party and that he had, "most fully appreciated the state of things".[122] In contrast, Campbell-Bannerman the following year, "astonished his hearers [at the National Liberal Federation] by the warmth of his defence of Home Rule, asking how they could abandon this Irish policy so long as they called themselves Liberals".[123]

Rosebery's standing with the Free Churches was further consolidated in November 1899 when he presented a statue of Cromwell to the nation. Jane Stoddart told British Weekly readers that the long section of the address in which "Lord Rosebery vindicated Cromwell from the charge of hypocrisy was the most magnificent effort I have ever heard from

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[121] Perks to Rosebery, 20th January 1898, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.17.

[122] British Weekly, 10th March 1898.

[123] Annual Register 1899, in J.Wilson, CB.: a life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, London 1973, pp.108-9.

him".[124] Perks congratulated Rosebery and remarked, "I have always said that any statesman who can completely command the confidence and gain the ear of Nonconformity and Labour in this country would sweep the field".[125] Two days later he warned Rosebery that it would be wiser not to meet a delegation of Nonconformists if he could not give them concrete assurances on religious freedom in elementary schools, temperance, the "crisis of the Churches"[126] and Disestablishment. Perks was hesitant about Rosebery's ability to meet Dissenters without making some error. Yet he added that if Rosebery could speak with any confidence on Nonconformist issues he could rally the Free Churches, "the most powerful fighting force of Liberalism," to his side.[127]

v. Imperialism and National Efficiency:

By 1899 the grumblings of the young M.P.s who had

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[124] British Weekly, 16th November 1899.

[125] Perks to Rosebery, 2nd December 1899, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.42.

[126] This referred to the increase of Ritualism in the Church of England. In May 1899 the Commons heard the Second Reading of a Church Discipline Bill conceived by the Liverpool Layman's League. The British Weekly urged the Free Churches to become involved in the debate and declared that Nonconformists and Evangelicals would stand no nonsense on the question of Ritualism. British Weekly, 18th May 1899. At a social evening Nicoll was reported to have given Lloyd George a "serious lecture" for his attitude to the Bill. Perks to Rosebery, 20th May 1899, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.35. This is incorrectly recorded as Nicoll giving Lloyd George a serious lecture on Rosebery's merits. Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.34.

[127] Perks to Rosebery, 4th December 1899, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS. 10050, f.46.

formed the Articles Club had become known as Liberal Imperialism. Their purpose was to bring about a rejuvenation of domestic reform by alerting the nation to the needs of the imperial race. The Liberal Imperialists secularised the moral imperatives of the Idealist philosophy and gradually replaced the quasi- religious language of Green with the more materialistic language of efficiency. But a germ of Idealism remained and this appeased the sense of social responsibility within the Nonconformist conscience. However the Liberal Imperialists were associated in the public mind with imperialism rather than radicalism.[128] Rosebery's own definition of his creed was the fusion of the old Liberal spirit from before 1886 with "the new Imperial spirit". J.A. Spender retrospectively called it a revival of the Palmerstonian spirit.[129]

Nicoll was comfortable with a celebratory Imperialism. He later explained to James Denney, "I am an Imperialist for the reason that I think the Union between the Mother country and the dependencies is on the whole good for both".[130] Nevertheless the British Weekly was alert to the problems of an aggressive British foreign policy. It took the occasion of the dispute with Venezuela over the

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[128] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.14.

[129] P.D.Jacobson, "Rosebery and Liberal Imperialism, 1899-1903," Journal of British Studies, Vol.13, November 1973, pp.85, 83.

[130] Nicoll to Denney, 30th July 1909, in Darlow, op.cit., p.207.

boundary of British Guiana to highlight Britain's moral isolation in the world noting, "it is proper to ask whether our spirit of aggression, and our consuming desire for commercial prosperity, may not have put us in the wrong".[131]

Naval Estimates had been a divisive issue for both parties since Stead had decided to rouse, "the sluggish mind of the general public" and awaken the government to the plight of Britain's beleaguered Navy.[132] The press remained largely unaware of the extent to which Liberal Cabinets were disturbed by the question of increasing militarism. The fundamental reason for Gladstone's resignation was not immediately revealed to the public nor were the subsequent disagreements between Harcourt and Rosebery. But problems in the Near East in 1896 highlighted the divisions within the party.[133] When Rosebery resigned the leadership in 1896 over the Armenian controversy the British Weekly believed his speech in Edinburgh alienated many Liberal M.P.s and pleased Tory newspapers. Both Clifford and Hughes had condemned Rosebery's repudiation of the Cyprus Convention and the British Weekly presented Rosebery's speech as a great disappointment to every friend of Armenia.[134] It had already joined in the call for the Government to realize that the time for action had come and British Weekly readers had responded promptly and generously to the

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[131] British Weekly, 9th January 1896.

[132] Pall Mall Gazette, 15th September 1884.

[133] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, pp.24-25.

[134] British Weekly, 15th October 1896.

Armenian Refugees Fund.[135]

Both Harcourt and Morley resigned their front bench positions in protest against the increasing jingoism, and that the "chosen people of the Liberal Press and Party had become addicted to strange gods".[136] The British Weekly believed that in publishing his correspondence in the Times, Harcourt had "committed a great misdemeanour, and done what he could to injure the cause of Liberalism at this time". It held John Morley equally guilty and objected to his attacks at Brechin on Rosebery's stand on Fashoda arguing that "in common with almost everyone in the country," it believed that, "the policy actually pursued was a policy of peace".[137] The British Weekly chose to "reiterate what [it had] said all along, that there is no schism in the Liberal party on these questions of Empire, and there is not one of us who does not oppose extravagance, and bluster, and greed".[138]

The outbreak of the Boer war in October 1899 exacerbated the differences within the Liberal party and the Imperialists saw it as their opportunity to take control.[139] The Free Churches were also desperately divided. Bebbington records the bulk of Nonconformists who

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[135] British Weekly, 10th September 1896, 1st October 1896.

[136] Harcourt to Morley, 10th October 1898, Harcourt Papers, in Stansky, op.cit., p.260.

[137] British Weekly, 15th December 1898, 26th January 1899. The British Weekly had already expressed support for the Government's policy, 13th October 1898.

[138] British Weekly, 26th January 1899.

[139] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.44.

held, "that the war was honourable though lamentable were neither Jingoes nor pro-Boers, but their favourable disposition to Empire separated them far more sharply from the opponents of the war than from those who gloried in it outright".[140] When the Parliament assembled for a war session in October 1899, the British Weekly reported that the best speech had been made by Campbell-Bannerman and acquiesced in his view that British diplomacy was reprehensible but that the tone of Kruger's ultimatum made it impossible for any Government to take it into consideration.[141] In December the British Weekly addressed the relationship between Christianity and war. It posited the view that "Christianity does not forbid war in all circumstances," and with specific reference to the Boer war its position was "perfectly clear".

> The demands made by Britain in the memorable dispatch of September 8th were acknowledged by all to be reasonable. In our view they were rejected in a manner which showed that the Transvaal meant to make no real concession, and the ultimatum made war inevitable.[142]

The readership of the British Weekly appeared to endorse the political and religious convictions of its editor. One correspondent wrote in support of the view that, "A speedy and intoxicating triumph would have been

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[140] Bebbington, Nonconformist Conscience, p.122.

[141] British Weekly, 9th October 1899. At the outset of the war it did not appear to the British Weekly that Rosebery offered a credible alternative as leader. It pilloried him for shirking the battle. British Weekly, 26th October 1899.

[142] British Weekly, 21st December 1899.

God's great curse on Britain...We are being tested as we never were before".[143]

The following month W.T.Stead set up the Stop the War Committee and John Clifford was enrolled as president.[144] However the mood of the country made it very difficult to maintain an anti-war stand. Silvester Horne, a Congregational minister, experienced the loneliness of standing on the opposite side of national sentiment. "There is alienation where opinion on some great question is fiercely divided..," he wrote in January 1900, "My sympathies are all with my country; but my convictions are against her. The feeling that she is wrong, and is pursuing at appalling cost a wrong path, is agonizing".[145]

Wesleyan Methodists, traditionally more imperialist than other Nonconformists had among their number M.P.'s such as Perks and Fowler who were extremely supportive of the war effort. Hugh Price Hughes received a high level of attention for the severity of his attacks on pro-Boers. In Hughes' view, "the British Government acted not in a spirit of aggression...but out of a moral obligation to maintain its influence thereby to make the empire safe for Wesleyanism".[146] The Daily Chronicle suggested that Hughes denounced misrule by Boers because he was related to a Rand millionaire (his wife's second cousin). The

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[143] British Weekly, 4th January 1900.

[144] Watts, op.cit., p.300.

[145] W.B.Selbie, (edit) The Life of Charles Silvester Horne, M.A. M.P., London, 1920, p.113.

[146] S.Koss, "Wesleyanism and Empire," The Historical Journal, XVIII, 1 (1975), pp.110-111.

Chronicle (before it also turned on the "pro-Boers") treated him to the ridicule, "Now they hint that lust for booty / Lures you from the path of duty, / Deaf to friendships *Et Tu Brute*, / Hugh Price Hughes".[147]

The formation of the Imperial Liberal Council in April before the 1900 General Election was testimony to Liberal Imperialist fear of attack from both the pro-Boers and the Unionists.[148] Perks reported a "very satisfactory" first meeting of about fifty members. The question of most moment was the name of the group and it was decided that the Liberal revolt against the Little England faction was too strong to warrant dropping the word "Imperial".[149] Defeat in the election was inevitable and the Liberal Imperialist hope was to ride the debacle and build the party up from its foundations.[150] In this task Perks assured Rosebery that he had the support of the leading Nonconformist journals, the Christian World, the British Weekly, the Methodist Recorder and the Methodist Times.[151] Nicoll could now be looked upon by Roseberians as a "stalwart and accomplished friend".[152]

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[147] Hugh Price Hughes Papers, John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

[148] S.Koss, Asquith, London, 1976, p.51.

[149] Perks to Rosebery, 10th April 1900, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.60.

[150] Perks to Rosebery, 28th May 1900, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.67.

[151] Perks to Rosebery, 9th July 1900, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.71.

[152] Perks to Rosebery, 9th August 1900, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.74.

The consensus among the Imperialist Free Churchmen was that annexation and conciliation were the only sound basis to end the war. The Methodist Times argued that it was always the mistake of the Liberal party to neglect the colonies and fail to appreciate the destiny of the race. Rosebery's, "sane Imperialism as distinguished from...wild-cat Imperialism,...a larger patriotism," appeared to be the only counter to the Little Englanders and Unionists.[153] But the support of the press was fitful. On the same day Asquith wrote to Rosebery thanking him for a letter of support as, "Our press is a sight for gods and men: even Spender is making a poor show".[154]

The Khaki Election in October brought a predictable defeat for the Liberals. Perks assured Rosebery that the Little Englanders had been hopelessly beaten. Thereafter he proposed using the Imperial Liberal Council as a medium of friendly consultation and cooperation in the reorganisation of the existing Liberal institutions. This was a somewhat magnanimous gesture in the wake of an election which had returned in Perks' view, 142 supporters of Lord Rosebery, 33 opponents and 7 doubtfuls, to sit on the Liberal benches. Perks also assured Rosebery that he had the support of the majority of Liberal dailies and the entire Nonconformist press.[155] The British Weekly was in a

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[153] Methodist Times, 20th September 1900, Perks to Rosebery, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.90.

[154] Asquith to Rosebery, 20th September 1900, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10001, f.97.

[155] The Times assessment was: 45 Little Englanders, 81 Liberal Imperialists and 58 Undeclared. Perks to Rosebery, 19th October 1900, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.108.

mood for reconciliation. "The rank and file of the party is sound," it argued, "and will be most grievously disappointed if there are fresh dissentions among the leaders on old and dead issues. We must agree to differ as to the origin of the war, and we must respect conscientious conviction wherever it is found".[156]

Despite Perks' resolve to play down old differences the I.L.C. passed three resolutions which underlined the success of the Liberal Imperialists and looked to the Little Englanders to explain the Party's overall failure. The Council stated that it was time to distinguish clearly those in the Liberal party whose, "opinions naturally disqualify them from controlling the action of the Imperial Parliament of a world-wide community of nations".[157] The British Weekly found this "singularly unfortunate," viewing it as a call for an immediate split in the party: a split which would be made final by the stigmatising as unpatriotic those who did not want the war. It rallied to the defence of Campbell-Bannerman who had made "some very sensible remarks on Liberal unity," and warned:

> No good will be done by forcing Lord Rosebery's claim to the general leadership, and no one would more abhor any such attempt than Lord Rosebery himself. The quarrel about Imperialism is very largely a quarrel about words, for the minority which thinks we can abandon our possessions is quite small.[158]

In December Perks told Campbell-Bannerman that the

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[156] British Weekly, 18th October 1900.

[157] British Weekly, 25th October 1900.

[158] British Weekly, 25th October 1900.

Imperial Council was a very powerful one and, "had much of the intellect, influence and wealth of young Liberalism; and that [they] did not mean to disband till [they] saw [the] party well established on sound Imperial lines".[159] A few months later Perks finally convinced Grey and Haldane to attend an I.L.C. dinner; the first public recognition from the Liberal front bench.[160]

The increasing association between Asquith, Grey and Haldane with Milner emphasised their distance from the Little England section of the party.[161] In June Campbell-Bannerman countered with his denunciation of "methods of barbarism," an attempt to dictate the emphasis of the party's Imperial line. His speech was seen by Liberal Imperialists as an attack on the war itself.[162] The British Weekly echoed Haldane that, "while the policy of concentration is most disagreeable, no alternative has been suggested". It warned that the inefficiency of the Government could only be corrected by an opposition eager to bring the war to an end and, "...in leaguing himself with the anti-war section, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman is on very dangerous ground".[163] Nevertheless the balance was beginning to shift within the party. Beatrice Webb observed the '"retreat" of the Liberal Party within the old

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[159] Perks to Rosebery, 5th December 1900, Rosebery Papers, MS.10050, f.122.

[160] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.62.

[161] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.63.

[162] Matthew, Liberal Imperialists, p.65.

[163] British Weekly, 20th June 1901.

lines of Gladstonianism, under the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman nominally, but of the pro-Boers actually.'[164] In the summer and autumn the Daily News helped to gather signatures for a Free Church Ministers' Manifesto on the War; 5,245 of nearly 10,000 divines in England and Wales complied.[165] In August the I.L.C. changed its name to the Liberal (Imperial) League, marking greater moderation.

Rosebery was still the only probable leader for the Imperialists but he remained elusive. In October the British Weekly had commented on the irony of his appeal to the people to press for the reorganisation of the Services, "The contrast between his advice and his political conduct would be ludicrous if it were not so melancholy".[166] However notification that Rosebery was to make a speech at Chesterfield suggested that he was ready to come out of isolation.[167]

Chesterfield was presented as Rosebery's own "unmuzzling". He opened his address with the promise that he intended to "speak his mind" and declared that the Liberal party, now free from the Irish alliance, had to gain or regain unity and in turn regain the confidence of the country. To the delight of the crowd Rosebery implored the Liberal party to "beware of dissociating themselves, even indirectly or unconsciously, or by any careless word, from the new sentiment of Empire which has sprung up among

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[164] 9th July, B.Webb, Our Partnership, London, 1948, p.217.

[165] Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.32.

[166] British Weekly, 17th October 1901.

[167] British Weekly, 14th November 1901.

us". "Efficiency" was the watchword. It began with parliamentary reform and was also to be extended to more efficient promotion of commerce and industry, extension of education, housing reform and an earnest effort to settle the temperance problem.[168]

As a manifesto it clung to generalisations. But for contemporaries Rosebery's address had excited great interest and was not reported as a disappointment. The possibility that the Liberal Imperialists would secede from the Liberal party if it proved incapable of reform hung over the event.[169] In fact Rosebery delivered no ultimatums but instead excited his listeners and journalists with his go-home-and-prepare-for-government message. The Times confirmed that it had been a momentous speech from the Liberal point of view as Rosebery was "sketching in earnest the policy of an alternative Government, and it was not to be the policy foreshadowed by the National Liberal Federation".[170]

Chesterfield showed signs of the influence of Sidney Webb who was at hand with a comprehensive plan if Rosebery cared to take it on board. In his September article "Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch", Webb encapsulated the arguments and language of the National Efficiency debate. He argued that the Liberal party had been collapsing since 1874 because it had lost its Progressive instinct. Webb

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[168] Times, 17th December 1901.

[169] A.Sykes, Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903-1913, Oxford, 1979, p.19.

[170] Times, 17th December 1901.

derided the redundant individualism of Gladstonian Liberalism, arguing that the opening of the twentieth century had found a new England "thinking in communities". The old beached Liberalism which was "inveterately negative" had aimed at "the abstract right of the individual to lead exactly the kind of life that he likes (and can pay for), unpenalised by any tax for purposes of which he individually disapproves". [171]

The new language belonged to men like Asquith who asked "what is the use of talking about Empire if here, at its very centre, there is always to be found a mass of people,...huddled and congested beyond the possibility of realising in any true sense either social or domestic life?"[172] For Liberal Imperialists the squalid conditions of the working class represented, not merely a disgrace, but a "positive danger" to civilisation.[173] Here lay the full force of the argument behind the need for a national minimum.

Purging the party of Gladstonian soul also meant ridding it of its commitment to the atomization of the Empire in the form of Home Rule for Ireland. Webb argued that the maximum individual development of each member of the Empire would not be secured by "allowing each unit to pursue its own ends without reference to the welfare of the

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[171] Webb, "Houndsditch," p.371.

[172] Webb, "Houndsditch," p.375.

[173] Webb, "Houndsditch," p.376.

whole".[174] While Socialists understood the importance of collective rejuvenation at home, Webb harried them for their inability to understand the importance of the Empire. The Boer War had exposed their capacity to out-morley Mr. Morley.[175]

At Chesterfield, the countering influence of Robert Perks meant that Rosebery included references to education and temperance reform despite Webb's attacks on those who wanted to "revenge their outraged temperance principles on the publican and their outraged Nonconformists principles on the Church".[176] But Rosebery's line on the ensuing war in South Africa was more conciliatory than the bellicose "Imperial Perks" would have liked. Rosebery emphasised the necessity of being ready to listen to overtures of peace, even from the exiled Transvaal Government, while tactfully distancing himself from Campbell-Bannerman's "methods of barbarism" viewpoint.[177] The presence of Perks and the Webbs at Rosebery's ear personified the conflict within Rosebery's political creed, the confusion of radical and conservative doctrines. After the "Houndsditch" piece Perks suggested to Rosebery that one of the reasons the middle classes and artisans tended towards Toryism, "is that as these classes have prospered or acquired their houses they have inclined to the Conservative Party because

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[174] Webb, "Houndsditch," p.372.

[175] Webb, "Houndsditch," p.374.

[176] Webb, "Houndsditch," p.370.

[177] Perks to Rosebery, 6th December 1901, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, ff.194-195.

they dread the doctrines which Sidney Webb thinks would be so popular".[178]

The problem for Rosebery's supporters was that he understood the importance of the new "good cry" but he could not provide a comprehensive programme to accompany "National Efficiency". The Webbs accepted that Rosebery's primary role was as an iconoclast of the Gladstonian ideals. Beatrice wrote that even if he failed to be constructive, "then he [Rosebery] leaves the field open to Asquith, Grey and Haldane with a good deal of the rubbish cleared away".[179]

For others this was not enough. Those like Lloyd George and Principal Rainy expressed doubts which might have come from Nicoll. Lloyd George recognised the problems of the clean slate: "Lord Rosebery seemed to think that because Liberals were beaten they should give up everything...No taxation of ground rents, no Welsh Disestablishment, no payment of Members, no Home Rule for Ireland - nothing but remounts and recantations".[180] Principal Rainy wrote to Haldane outlining his position:

> I suppose Lord Rosebery and his friends go on the view that there is plenty of time to develope (sic) a positive programme and there may be reasons to recommend that course. But in the mean time people are very much influenced by the sound of it. They say this will not work; there is nothing here to elicit

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[178] Perks to Rosebery, 8th September 1901, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, ff.174-175.

[179] B. Webb, 26th July 1901, Diary. Volume Two, p.215.

[180] Daily News, 17th February 1902, Lloyd George Papers, House of Lords Record Office, A/10/2/9.

> or embody Liberal enthusiasms. You cannot go to the constituencies with a clean slate. Rosebery has mentioned Temperance and education, but on neither has he proclaimed a line of distinct action. These impressions operate [?] powerfully with many who would rather agree with Lord Rosebery in wishing to show themselves free of definite obligations in regard to Ireland.
> ...you must have emphatic Liberal labels and among these you must come in the end to religious equality. Imperialism and efficiency will not do, if only because the Tories as far as words go will overcrow you on both.[181]

Haldane passed the letter on to Rosebery and his comments revealed the difficulties facing Dissenters in pressing their case upon the Liberal leadership:

> The enclosed comes from Principal Rainy. He is genuinely with us, and knows too much to be pressing his Disestablishment cause. He is a very able man, but perhaps hardly conscious of the difficulties which attend what he recommends in the last <u>half</u> of his letter.[182]

Nicoll was prepared to support Rosebery after Chesterfield because unlike Lloyd George he could not cleave to the traditional Radicals in the Liberal party because of their adherence to the principle of Home Rule. His position was closer to Principal Rainy's: Nicoll saw in Rosebery a possible lever to a Free Church agenda and this was the price of public backing.

However the chief interest of Chesterfield as it was presented in the <u>British Weekly</u> was Rosebery's "disclosure or non disclosure of his relationship with the Liberal

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[181] Rainy to Haldane, 25th February 1902, Haldane Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS.5905, f.162.

[182] Haldane to Rosebery, 27th February 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10030, ff.12-13.

party". He was presented as a politician who had long been aware of the mischief of the Irish question but who muffled his criticisms for the sake of the party. "Indeed," the British Weekly felt, "it [was] quite possible that Lord Rosebery sacrificed much of his reputation and influence on the altar of unity".[183] Chesterfield allayed the fears of the British Weekly. Rosebery was not going to provoke schism within the Liberal party as he did not appear to put himself forward as a candidate for the leadership; an act which would no doubt cause the party to split. This was in marked contrast to the view of newspapers such as the Daily Mail, the Speaker, and the Spectator. "Briefly we may say," wrote the Daily Mail, "that Lord Rosebery threw over both the Liberal and the Tory Parties and offered himself to a new party whose watchword will be efficiency".[184]

On the question of "national efficiency" the British Weekly endorsed Rosebery's view that a strong Opposition was essential to offer constructive criticisms of the Government. The newspaper extended the call for greater diligence in Parliament to a demand for greater efficiency in the country at large. "The truth is that," it warned, "during many years of peace and great prosperity, John Bull waxed fat and drowsy". The British Weekly was contentedly captivated by the essence of Rosebery's demands and declared, "Efficiency is the word of the nation today. It is a matter of life or death, and whether Lord Rosebery

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[183] British Weekly, 19th December 1901.

[184] Daily Mail, 17th December 1901, in G.R.Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency: a study in British politics and political thought, 1899-1914, London 1990, p.133.

succeeds or fails, history will recognise that he has put his finger on the centre".[185] This was enough for the British Weekly as explicit programmes might mean more Webb than Perks and an end to the Nonconformist agenda. Clean slates allowed all sections the opportunity of lobbying their causes.

For Nicoll however Rosebery's main achievement had been to bury Home Rule. Haldane's attempts to encourage the organisation of a Scottish National Liberal Association to promote the Chesterfield policy underlined its significance for the party. Haldane contended that the new organisation should, "explicitly exclude the Home Rule policy of 86 and 93 as having been madness".[186] He wrote to Asquith on the 5th January arguing that Rosebery should move to an explicit anti-Home Rule position.[187] "It may take long - years perhaps - to get free from the evil traditions of the feeble counsels of the past eight years..." Haldane wrote to Rosebery of the commitment to Home Rule, "But as a member of a great historic party I feel that I have something to fight for that I can be proud of".[188]

The Liberal Imperialist move towards Unionism intensified the divisions between Campbell-Bannerman and Rosebery. The controversy over Campbell-Bannerman's

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[185] British Weekly, 19th December 1901.

[186] Haldane to Rosebery, 3rd January 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10030, f.2.

[187] Jenkins, Asquith, p.131.

[188] Haldane to Rosebery, 16th February 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10030, f.8.

amendment to the Address in January 1902 revealed the contribution of Home Rule to the party's problems. Wemyss Reid wrote to Rosebery, "C.B.'s reference to Home Rule is generally resented. It was absolutely unnecessary, and has done us no good in any quarter".[189] At the N.L.F. conference the following month Campbell-Bannerman left no doubt that he was out of sympathy with the idea of the clean slate, "I am not prepared to erase from the tablets of my creed any principle or...ideal...of Liberalism". He added that to abandon Home Rule because it was not expedient was not "a very creditable or even a decent view of the case".[190]

The defence of this shibboleth left Nicoll firmly ensconced in the Roseberian camp. On the 4th March Compton Rickett held a meeting of representative Free Church Ministers with Campbell-Bannerman and Herbert Gladstone. Nicoll wrote to Rosebery of the "practical unanimity" in favour of Rosebery's leadership with Campbell-Bannerman in the Commons. Nicoll claimed that although Campbell-Bannerman was agreeable to serve under Rosebery, no resolution could be passed because Compton-Rickett said that was not the purpose of the meeting.[191] Silvester Horne who was also present recorded a less harmonious meeting:

> [J.H.Shakespeare] practically said it must be

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[189] Wemyss Reid to Rosebery, 22nd January 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10058, f.5.

[190] Times, 20th February 1902.

[191] Nicoll to Rosebery, 5th March 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10168, f.

> Lord Rosebery or a split. Robertson Nicoll said that the Irish Alliance had done us no good, and that he dissented from every word that Rickett had spoken. [Rickett having taken the side of Campbell-Bannerman against Rosebery] Herbert Gladstone, in a wise and fine spirited speech, tried to throw oil on the troubled waters. But the surges of Imperialism would not be allayed.[192]

In his report Nicoll ventured that there was sufficient information to suggest that in both England and Scotland Nonconformists were very largely with Rosebery. He therefore suggested that it would add to this feeling if in Rosebery's forthcoming speech he were to give some indication to Nonconformists. He added that Dissenters would be considerably disappointed if Rosebery did not say something about the impending education measures which would mean perhaps the extinction of Nonconformists in poor parishes.[193] Revealing again that Nicoll was ever mindful of his own agenda.

The British Weekly was an immediate supporter of the Liberal League set up in the wake of Chesterfield. It explained that those who adhered to Rosebery's policy had no intention of severing themselves from the Liberal party but instead intended to act with the rest of the Liberal Opposition in advancing that policy. Despite Nicoll's personal views, the British Weekly conceded that Rosebery had not enhanced his chances of regaining the leadership of the party by his long periods of non-involvement. It recognised that Campbell-Bannerman had gathered a lot of

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[192] Selbie, Silvester Horne, pp.127-9.

[193] Nicoll to Rosebery, 5th March 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10168,

support to himself by "plodding diligently through the foulest of weather" although many of his supporters were not wholly in sympathy with his policies. However Rosebery's presidency of the Liberal League appeared as a sign that he was now ready to pay the cost of party leadership, and "will pay the upmost farthing without flinching, without complaint".[194]

The ending of the Boer war in June removed some of the contentious issues which stood between the Liberal League and the rest of the party. The eventual and hard won victory of the war left most Britons anxious about the future of the Imperial nation. Nicoll joined the General Council of the League in July 1902.[195] R.J.Campbell, Joseph Parker and Guinness Rogers were among the other Free Church leaders who joined.[196] Respect for Empire and domestic efficiency were appealing concepts to traditional Free Church leaders.

vi. Conclusion:

The purpose of the British Weekly had been to perpetuate a religious dialogue in an increasingly secular environment. But the language of the debate was changing and with it the nature of Protestantism itself. Increasing concentration on the life of Christ as well as his

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[194] British Weekly, 6th March 1902.

[195] Perks to Rosebery, 16th July 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10050, f.278.

[196] Koss, Nonconformity Politics, p.34.

Atonement converted itself into a responsibility to save the bodies as well as the souls of the nation's poor in order to give a physical meaning to Christianity.

Liberals too accepted that social ills could not be cured at one remove and that greater State intervention was required. Nicoll could partake of this discourse but he maintained a residual belief that spiritual salvation could not be achieved simply through social reform. Theologically he was apart from progressives like John Clifford and politically his Radicalism stopped short of a Socialist solution. Nicoll belonged to that section of Liberal Radicals - like Samuel, Stapely and Murray McDonald of the Rainbow Circle - which believed that the future lay with "one great party of progress".[197] He wanted the Liberal party to accommodate the Labour movement without having the latter dictate the agenda; a common feature of the Lib-Labism of the 1890s. Alongside the fear that Labour would overpower Liberalism was the greater concern that Christianity would be removed completely from politics.

Gladstone had represented an assurance that political morality and Christianity would remain intertwined. However he also stood as a bulwark of the Established Church and champion of Irish self government. In 1898 the British Weekly called again on the Liberal leadership to "give over flying kites, and say distinctly that they are not going to the country on this [Home Rule] issue". It

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[197] B.Wasserstein, Herbert Samuel: a political life, Oxford 1992, p.39.

now argued that many had voted for Home Rule out of loyalty to Gladstone and the Liberal party; if the two had been separate the outcome would have been different.[198] But this was to rewrite the past. In 1887 the British Weekly had argued that there was a moral case to be answered in Britain's handling of Ireland[199] and the later revision was an attempt to circumvent the moral imperative because it was no longer politically congenial to the Free Churches. Again in 1902 the British Weekly attempted to undermine the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman when it ascribed his authority to personal loyalty rather than the force of his political principles.[200]

The commitment of the official Liberal leadership to Home Rule pushed Nicoll towards the party's Roseberian section. The Liberal Imperialists were increasingly averse to binding the party to Irish legislation and Perks worked hard to establish Rosebery as someone who would be responsive to Free Church influence. Rosebery's progressive past at the L.C.C. also allowed him to be presented as a social reformer. Some Radicals rationalised the relationship between Imperialism and domestic reform by arguing that "the Empire created the wealth that made domestic reform possible and uplifted indigenous population of the colonies".[201] Through Liberal Imperialism Nicoll

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[198] British Weekly, 29th December 1898.

[199] British Weekly, 26th March 1887.

[200] British Weekly, 6th March 1902.

[201] Herbert Samuel, "Imperialism and Social Reform," Minutes of the Rainbow Circle meeting, 17th January 1900, British Library of Political Science, London, Coll. Misc. 575/1, in Wasserstein,

could reconcile his recognition of the need for social reform with the appeal to his imperial inclinations and more importantly, cast off Irish Nationalist shackles. Social reform was never prioritised by Nicoll in the way that it was by Clifford and Hughes. He knew that it was necessary in order to maintain the relevance of the Liberal party and by association the Free Churches, but there was no real passion in the British Weekly's advocacy of change.

In 1904 Denney wrote to Nicoll, "I share strongly your opinion that it is a pity to see the Christian religion beaten out of the region in which people generally lead their intellectual life".[202] Here lay the real national crisis in Nicoll's eyes. In 1902 Balfour's Education Act offered a way of returning the intellectual and emotional energies of the nation to a religious cause. The radical language of Right wing Liberalism was abandoned as the phrases of the Free Church tradition were trawled. The British Weekly had campaigned against the system which made "the sole test of Liberal orthodoxy Home Rule, and allow[ed] a man to be as illiberal as he pleases about everything else".[203] But in 1902 it found its own single issue to transcend all others and argued that the Education Act should become a "test question" for all parties. It urged readers to "vote for anyone, Liberal, Unionist, or Labourist who opposed the Bill in preference to anyone who

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Herbert Samuel, p.41.

[202] Denney to Nicoll, 19th February 1904, in Letters of Principal Denney, p.43.

[203] British Weekly, 2nd November 1888.

supported it, by whatever name he chose to call himself".[204] The motivation was overtly sectarian and efficiency had been forgotten.

[204] British Weekly, 9th October 1902.

CHAPTER THREE

THE QUESTION OF EDUCATION

The British Weekly was at the forefront of the campaign for religious equality in education. It argued that this could best be achieved through equal right of entry for all religions in schools; a position which placed it somewhere between the secularists and the nondenominationalists. This difference was often lost in the more general battle with Anglicans and Unionists. Nicoll was not a champion of the Board School system. He did not believe that nondenominational teaching of religion in these schools was adequate. Consequently he was less than hostile towards the 1896 Education Bill which gave Nonconformists the opportunity to provide religious teaching in Church schools where there was adequate parental demand. The subsequent Education Bills in 1901 and 1902 provided neither public control nor right of entry in Voluntary schools and the British Weekly responded with a call for a campaign of nonpayment of the educational rate. In the course of the debate Nicoll established himself as an important player. He was referred to as a voice of Nonconformity even though his responses, having an internal consistency, were often a step removed from the general Free Church position.

i. Nonconformists and Education:

The battle to control education had consumed much energy in the second half of the nineteenth century. Until the 1860s most Nonconformists had accepted the general view that the State had no direct responsibility to

provide the nation's education. This attitude was part of a general suspicion of the State due to its intrinsic association with the Church. However in the last decades of the century Dissenters came to accept the view that the only efficient method of educating the population was under the auspices of the Government.[1] It was part of the larger campaign for Disestablishment which had been gathering strength since the 1840s and the determination that the close association between Church and State should no longer prevent Dissenters from taking an active part in the future of the nation.

The haphazard nature of the English educational system compelled Gladstone's first ministry to take some steps towards reform. The debate over educational reform revolved around the alternative choices of indirect state control by greater government assistance to existing Voluntary schools and more direct state involvement through the setting up of schools which would be run by elected boards and funded through the rates. As Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Wesleyans had much greater investment in the denominational Voluntary schools they favoured the first option. Conversely the Free Churches became associated with the campaign for free, secular, compulsory primary education. Support was crystallized in the formation of the National Education League in 1869.[2] The major aim of Nonconformity at this time was, "not to preserve its

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[1] A.W.W.Dale, The Life of R.W.Dale of Birmingham, London, 1898, p.268.

[2] Machin, op.cit., pp.31-32.

interest against the state but to roll back the educational hegemony of the Church of England".[3]

The Education Act of 1870 was a compromise which failed to appease the Nonconformist community. The Government committed itself to giving financial assistance to Voluntary schools; although it was decided this money should not be raised through the rates. The Act also set up Board schools in areas where no Voluntary school existed. These were to be administered by publicly elected bodies which were funded by the rates. Although the Cowper-Temple Clause protected the nondenominational teaching of religion in State funded schools, the Act was seen as a way of propping up sectarian schools with State money and was therefore an affront to the Free Churches. When Nonconformists had conceded the need for the State to become involved in education they made it their task to ensure that the Church was removed from the equation. In this respect they had largely failed. Disappointment with the 1870 Act forced Nonconformists to examine their political and social identity and provided some of the language and terms for future debate.

Support for denominational education was seen as a direct attack on Nonconformity. Arguments against the 1870 Act were therefore a counter-attack on the apparent enemy forces. Diatribes against parsons and priests were used to underline the sinister nature of the Bill. Often fear of the Established Church was combined with intrinsic anti-Catholicism to suggest that Rome itself was the real enemy.

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[3] Bebbington, Nonconformist Conscience, p.127.

The Church of England's tolerance of ritualism in some quarters fuelled these arguments. In his unsolicited attempt to bring the Scottish into the crusade, Rev. R.W. Dale of Birmingham warned an Aberdeen audience of the travesty of Imperial grants being voted "for the maintenance of schools intended to propagate the Romanish faith". He admitted that, "the deep antagonism between the traditional policy of this [Catholic] Church and its theological faith, and the free spirit of the Gospel, compel me to swear eternal hatred to Rome".[4]

Their experiences during the early 1870s heightened Nonconformists' sense of being deliberately excluded from certain aspects of national life. Forster's 1870 Act threw into question the relationship between the Liberal party and the Free Churches. Nonconformists believed they had played an important part in the election of the 1868 Gladstonian Government and therefore deserved sympathetic handling in return.[5] Anglican influences within the Liberal party - most notably in the shape of its leader - were clearly underlined by its handling of the 1870 Act. Activity over the question of education had brought many Free Churchmen into the political arena and Forster's Act taught them a hard political lesson.

Many Nonconformists determined that their support for

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[4] Dale, op.cit., pp.294-295. The division of education by the end of the century was: Anglican: 11,777 schools, 1,885,802 children; Wesleyan: 458 schools, 125,727 children; Roman Catholic: 1,045 schools, 255,036 children; other: 1,079 schools, 220,032 children, in R.T.Shannon, Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915, London, 1986, p.495.

[5] Dale, op.cit., pp.276-277.

the Liberal party would no longer be taken for granted. Dale assured a Manchester audience that the Education Act, "relieves Nonconformists from their old allegiance to the Liberal party, and requires us so to organise our political power as to prevent the Liberal party from ever inflicting a similar injury again on the principles of religious equality".[6] The most direct result of this was the withdrawal of Radical Nonconformist support in the 1874 General Election from Liberals who did not oppose the Education Act. But Free Church retribution was wholly negative. It underlined Nonconformist influence within the Liberal party by undermining Gladstone's ministry. The unsatisfactory resolution of the controversy left the battle over education a running sore in the Nonconformist memory.

Educational reform remained *ad hoc* for the remainder of the nineteenth century. In 1880 elementary school attendance became compulsory for children between the ages of five and ten. This was not a realistic provision until 1891 when many nondenominational schools abolished the small fees charged to pupils and the cost was borne by the public. The heightening awareness that sporadic reform was insufficient spawned various educational Commissions and 1895 brought two significant reports. A committee appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to examine the financing of Church schools concluded that greater Government aid was needed for Voluntary schools and proposed that the state should take responsibility for

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[6] Dale, op.cit., p.286.

teachers' salaries. The more comprehensive Bryce Commission on Secondary Education - appointed by the Liberal Government - reported to Salisbury's ministry in August. It recommended a more uniform approach to secondary education which was to be organised through county and county borough councils.[7]

ii. Gorst's 1896 Bill:

Neither Salisbury nor Balfour felt any real commitment to overhaul the inadequate educational framework. Indeed Salisbury had no desire to tamper with an issue which was potentially threatening to his Liberal Unionist Coalition and he did not commit his party to educational reform in his July Manifesto of 1895.[8] Nevertheless it was widely accepted that Anglican support had been a significant factor in the Unionist General Election victory and consequently that the Government had a responsibility to provide aid for Voluntary Schools.[9] It was within this context that the Unionists began to draw up their abortive Bill of 1896. In December 1895 Balfour wrote to Bernard Mallet, his private secretary:

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[7] J.E.B.Munson, "The Unionist Coalition and Education, 1895-1902," The Historical Journal, 20, 3 (1977) p.613.

[8] R.F.Mackay, Arthur James Balfour: intellectual statesman, Oxford, 1985, p.72, J.E.B.Munson, "Unionist Coalition", p.614. In December Chamberlain wrote to Devonshire explaining that although he had abandoned disestablishment he could not "hold up his head for a day" if he agreed to rate aid for voluntary schools without public control. Machin, op.cit., p.226.

[9] Mackay, Balfour, p.73, Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.614.

> I shall be content if we succeed in saving the Voluntary Schools: I shall not be content if we fail in this object; and, in my opinion the whole question should be looked at from this point of view, and no extraneous provisions should be introduced into it except with the object of smoothing the passage of an effective measure through the House.[10]

Balfour's pre-election promise to his constituents that something would be done to help Church schools also belied his subsequent attempts to claim for Gorst's Bill an impartial commitment to efficient elementary education.[11] Consequently a large number of Nonconformists could see nothing more than a thinly hidden agenda. They opposed the Bill on the grounds that it was an a attack on Nonconformity and ironically (in the light of 1870) Board schools.

The circumstances which had surrounded the Free Church attack on Forster's 1870 Bill were very different from those which influenced their response to its 1896 successor. In 1896 the fact that Gorst's Bill was a Unionist measure meant that Nonconformists could rally their opposition to the proposed education reform without the complication of traditional allegiance. The Free Churches also had a collective representative body in 1896, the National Free Church Council.[12] Although Koss claimed

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[10] Balfour Papers, 49781, ff.57-58, in Mackay, Balfour, pp.73-74.

[11] Mackay, Balfour, p.72.

[12] Koss has argued that previous to the formation of this body "there had not existed the mechanism to canalise and mobilise Nonconformist opinion, or indeed the leadership to define goals and lay down strategy." However this does not take into account the pressure groups which opposed slavery and

that the National Council "inaugurated a new era" and cited its foundation as the real "threshold" of his study of political Nonconformity, he did concede that, "From the start, the National Council found it easier to proclaim its intentions than to translate them into policy".[13]

The Education Bill of 1896 provided an early opportunity for the National Free Church Council to represent the general Nonconformist position. The first Council had drawn up a united Nonconformist Programme on the subject of education. This included a commitment to the provision of a nonsectarian school within the reach of every child, appropriate representation of ratepayers in Voluntary schools receiving government funds, universal School Boards over sufficient areas, no right of entry into Board schools and a sufficient number of nondenominational training colleges.[14] In the wake of Gorst's Bill the Free Church Council drew up a manifesto denouncing the measure and urged local councils to make their position clear to M.P.s by writing letters and holding public meetings.[15] The will to unite the Free Churches into a political pressure group was easier to maintain than the reality. Underlying the negative response to the Education Bill was widespread disagreement over a positive Nonconformist

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championed purity, nondenominational education and disestablishment. Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.29.

[13] Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.29.

[14] Official Report...First National free Church Council 1896, pp.147-154, in Munson, "Passive Resistance", p.66.

[15] Christian World, 30th April 1896, in Bebbington, Nonconformist Conscience, p.73.

alternative for the education system.

The third and most important difference between the position of Nonconformists in 1870 and in 1896 was that by the later date they had achieved an amount of success in "roll[ing] back the educational hegemony of the Church of England" and now had something to defend. In the twenty-six years which had elapsed many Nonconformists had become favourably disposed to the Board School system. However the struggle to maintain this familiar nondenominational structure was very problematic. It had been born of the hated 1870 Act and a significant number of Nonconformists had serious reservations about championing an educational framework which had been initiated with little consideration for the Free Churches.

Liberal politicians in the majority underestimated the sense of betrayal which haunted the political consciousness of Dissenters. In the subsequent disputes over educational reform Liberal leaders such as Asquith and Harcourt defended the 1870 settlement without reference to the political difficulties it had incurred. In March 1896, in anticipation of the forthcoming Education Bill, Robert Perks gave a lengthy interview to Jane Stoddart. He outlined the weaknesses inherent in the post 1870 educational system and was highly critical of Anglican Voluntary schools, all of which were run with a large amount of public funds. Perks used his knowledge of Voluntary Methodist schools to show that 17 shillings out of every sovereign used by denominational schools came from public money. Unlike their Methodist counterparts the

Anglican schools were under the complete control of the clergy. Perks also argued that the Conscience Clause had never been universally effective and was weakest where it was most needed; in rural, single school areas. He apparently spoke for a significant number of Nonconformists when he stated that Dissenters had never seen Forster's Act as a lasting settlement, but rather something which was forced on them by Liberal and Tory votes.[16] The fact that the British Weekly also held this view explains its moderate opposition to the Unionists' educational proposals of 1896. The unsatisfactory nature of the 1870 settlement meant that it was less precious to some Nonconformists than it had apparently become to most Liberal Members of Parliament.

Perks (not surprisingly) promoted Rosebery as a Liberal who represented more accurately the position of Nonconformists. In Perks' view this position was: (1) that the standard of education should not be lowered; (2) there should be no interference with Board schools as at present constituted - the Cowper-Temple clause should be maintained; (3) If public funds were to be given to the Voluntary schools this should be accompanied by local control.[17] This very general statement of aims was not at odds with the resolution passed a few weeks later by the National Liberal Federation in Huddersfield. Augustine Birrell spoke for the motion:

> (1) that increased grants of public money to the Voluntary schools shall be accompanied by local representative control; (2) that any additional grant of public money shall go to

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[16] British Weekly, 5th March 1896.

[17] British Weekly, 5th March 1896.

> increase the efficiency of the schools; (3) that nothing shall be done to impair the efficiency of the Board schools or to weaken in any way the existing guarantees for their unsectarian character. The Council is further of the opinion that the demand of the teachers in Voluntary schools for relief from compulsory duties and for reasonable security of tenure should be granted.[18]

This loose collection of aims was in keeping with the general atmosphere of the Conference. Rosebery spoke at a meeting earlier in the day and freely declared that he had neither policy nor programme to put forward.[19] Birrell argued for his own vague statement of aims that it represented the "irreducible minimum" of Liberal demands. He warned his audience that education was under threat; "The great system of School Boards has afforded one of the noblest spheres of work to the citizens of this land, and this great achievement [is] now threatened by Lord Salisbury. Religious education! Why the education in the Board schools [is] a religious education".[20] The British Weekly declared that the speech was "brilliant and statesmanlike" and "showed a true understanding of the whole subject". (This praise was probably more the result of Birrell's warning that the Irish were playing a very dangerous game in their stand on denominational education.)[21] In reality Birrell's statement was not

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[18] Daily News, 28th March 1896.

[19] Times, 28th March 1896.

[20] Daily News, 28th March 1896.

[21] British Weekly, 2nd April 1896.

above contention. Gorst's Bill, which was introduced to the Commons four days later, exposed some subtle but significant differences among the leaders of the Nonconformist community. Nicoll then began to argue that it was not an automatic truth that the School Boards were "great" and "noble" or that the "religious education" they offered was satisfactory.

The Education Bill which was introduced on 31st March 1896 was viewed as "a measure even larger in its scope and more interesting in its specific proposals than had been generally anticipated".[22] It was hailed in some quarters as "a statesman-like and liberal-minded effort to solve an admittedly perplexing problem, and to improve and simplify the educational system..."[23] The complexity of the Bill meant that initial reactions from the Liberal side were cautious. In the House of Commons, the Liberal M.P. Arthur Acland placed on record his condemnation of the main principles of the Bill but could be no more specific.[24] To the press he simply stated that the measure signified a complete upheaval of the education system which would no doubt provoke great controversy.[25]

The Bill had indeed evolved into a more comprehensive measure than had originally been the intention of the Unionist Government. Nevertheless it clearly fulfilled Salisbury's and Balfour's earlier desire for a Bill, "to

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[22] Times, 1st April 1896.

[23] Scotsman, 1st April 1896.

[24] Times, 1st April 1896.

[25] British Weekly, 2nd April 1896.

protect denominational schools against the competition of Board schools through parliamentary assistance".[26] Gorst reminded the Commons that 2,445,812 children were educated by Voluntary schools while 1,879,218 attended Board schools.[27] He estimated that it would cost £20,000,000 to provide a Board school education for those presently in the Voluntary sector with an annual maintenance cost of £2,282,000.[28] A Bill which bolstered the Voluntary schools was the most economically viable response to the education problem.

The central feature of the Bill fulfilled the Education Department's aim of decentralising educational authority. It was proposed that all county and county-borough councils would become Local Education Authorities. These would have responsibilities which included administering grants, the inspection of schools and the setting of an education rate. The democratic principle was to be maintained through the mechanism of a committee which was to be the active arm of the L.E.A. and it was proposed that the majority of committee members should be councillors. Gorst's Bill also allocated a new Exchequer grant of 4s per capita for all Voluntary schools and needy Board schools and permitted L.E.A.s to lend money to voluntary bodies to help them build new schools.[29] The only comment by the British Weekly on the first reading of

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[26] Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.616.

[27] Times, 1st April 1896.

[28] British Weekly, 2nd April 1896.

[29] Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.617.

the Bill was that it would practically abolish the voluntary contribution.[30] The jurisdiction of the new Local Authorities clearly jeopardized the long term future of the School Boards. The responsibility for all new state run schools would be undertaken by the L.E.A.s; the new authorities also had the power to take over the responsibilities of inadequate Boards.[31]

Nonconformists were most concerned with the implications of the Bill for religious instruction within schools and focused their attention on Clause 27, the provision which Gorst called "a kind of supplement to the conscience clause".[32] It stated that elementary schools in receipt of government grants must provide separate religious instruction for children if this was requested by a "reasonable number" of parents. "We can hardly conceive", wrote the Times, "that there will be any great difficulty in carrying out this provision, though it is evident already that it will be unpalatable to extreme partisans on the one side and on the other".[33] Sir William Hart Dyke even suggested in the Commons that the new provision would act to the advantage of Nonconformist families which had previously lived in single school regions and had been forced to send their children to "parson's schools".[34] Indeed the Government saw Clause 27

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[30] British Weekly, 2nd April 1896.

[31] Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.617.

[32] Times, 1st April 1896.

[33] Times, 1st April 1896.

[34] Times, 1st April 1896.

as a "sop to dissenters". The Parliamentary draftsman Courtney Ilbert revealed in a private memorandum that the measure, "was a surviving fragment of a much stronger clause...to abolish the Cowper-Temple clause but which was whittled down at the insistence of Chamberlain".[35] Despite the sop, virtually all Nonconformists denounced the Bill but agreement on a more exact response was problematic. Leaders were divided on whether they should strenuously resist the Bill or put their energy into making it work as best they could.

The British Weekly adopted a pragmatic pose. Having had time to digest the Bill in written form it agreed with other Liberals that its tendency was to be "clerical, reactionary, and anti-democratic". But the British Weekly believed that it would be a very grave error to assume "that the country generally is in favour of the School Board system. Teachers hate it...[It is] oppressive to the teacher and injurious to the child. Neither can School Boards be said to be popular with parents".[36] Indeed it often seemed that a system which pressurized Nicoll's purse was as offensive to him as one which assailed his conscience. The British Weekly had little interest in the question of the Boards' future and remarked that if they, "continue to increase the rates they will themselves be

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[35] Ilbert MSS., Diary, n.d., in Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.619.

[36] British Weekly, 9th April 1896.

taking the most effective steps towards their ultimate extinction".[37]

From this standpoint the British Weekly proffered several observations. In Gorst's favour it suggested that the Bill was not as partisan as it might have been and that it exhibited an attempt to be fair, "or at least to be seen to be fair". The newspaper also conceded that teachers generally favoured the Bill because it offered the possibility of higher salaries. (However it felt that the increased grant was more likely to be used to decrease the level of voluntary subscriptions.) The British Weekly also looked favourably on the implications of the Bill for the improvement of the chaotic nature of education in England and Wales. It saw in Gorst's measure the "germ of something better...the promise of universal School Boards under another name". In criticism, the British Weekly had reservations about the financial constraints which L.E.A.'s were empowered to enforce over School Boards. Although Nicoll had been very critical of the extravagance of the Progressives in London he believed that Boards were better equipped to judge the economic needs of their schools than

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[37] British Weekly, 30th April 1896. Again in 1902 the British Weekly's initial response was to comment, "The more we see of the Bill the less we like it. But the first point is that the education rate will be trebled." British Weekly, 27th March 1902. The funding of education was always complex. Chamberlain had disturbed a hornet's nest in the 1870s with his sympathy for the idea that free education could be funded out of disendowment of the Church of England. M.Barker, Gladstone and Radicalism: the reconstruction of Liberal policy in Britain, 1885-94, Hassocks 1975, p.33. The British Weekly accepted that if education was compulsory it ought to be free but was uncertain about Chamberlain's bid in 1888 to abolish fees in both Voluntary and Board schools. It conceded that a compromise would have to be reached but it was clearly complicated. British Weekly, 1st June 1888.

an independent body not specifically chosen for that purpose. He also called for a clearer definition of the powers of the Education Department over the new Local Authorities as a guard against the whims of "new and untrained rulers".[38]

The provision for sectarian teaching in schools encompassed in Clause 27 did not meet with outright criticism from Nicoll. Although he stressed that Nonconformists had never asked for the measure he urged them to gather their resources and to counteract the spread of clericalism in Board schools with their own Evangelical teaching.[39] The central tenet of the British Weekly's stand on Clause 27 was the belief that nonsectarian religious education was ultimately a spurious concept. It argued that it was not possible to teach the Bible in a truly objective way in schools: therefore it was in breach of the secular role of the State to make declarations on what should and should not be included in the religious lessons of the Board schools. Equally the British Weekly was of the opinion that reliance on weekly Sunday school classes for the furtherance of denominational learning was wholly insufficient. It argued that Nonconformists such as Spurgeon and Dale, as advocates of secular education, had never provided an effective alternative to the teaching of religion in schools.[40] The first reading of the Education Bill prompted this comment:

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[38] British Weekly, 9th April 1896.

[39] British Weekly, 9th April 1896.

[40] British Weekly, 16th April 1896.

> What really lost us the battle in 1870 was that we had no plan for teaching the children religion. We clamoured for the committal of the churches, and when asked how the churches were to discharge it, we were perforce dumb. Now we are in no better case, but we admit that Sunday School teaching is not enough, and that it must be supplemented during the week. We shall be compelled to find out how it is to be supplemented...The emergency will discover our true strength...[41]

The British Weekly did not see Clause 27 as necessarily threatening to Nonconformity. It quoted the Church Times as saying that it was, "quite conceivable that the ultimate effect of Clause Twenty-Seven may be the extinction of the voluntary system".[42] The British Weekly suspected that Roman Catholic schools might close down rather than have heresy taught within their walls. As the Bill could usher in the ultimate decline of the Voluntary sector, it was argued that Roman Catholics and Anglicans would both fight to have the Bill dropped. Although hopeful that the Bill would be abandoned because education would receive better handling by a Liberal Government, the British Weekly showed no real fear of the new religious provisions within the Bill. Its view was stated simply: "we are not particularly desirous that the clause should stand, but we have argued that it is not the business of Nonconformists to destroy the clause, and if the clause becomes law, it is their plain duty to make the very best

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[41] British Weekly, 14th May 1896.

[42] British Weekly, 16th April 1896.

of it".[43] This included the conviction that Nonconformists should take positive and unified action working through a Federation of Free Churches. Nicoll despaired of the capacity of Nonconformist bodies to pass resolutions at the expense of action. The British Weekly contended, "Our present political position is very much due to the fact that we have done so much make believe. We have been afraid to speak out frankly, and what have we gained by it all?"[44]

The British Weekly's arguments were more cerebral than those being offered for general consumption by more emotive orators and this gained Nicoll public criticism from both Clifford and Hughes. Clifford's remonstrance of the British Weekly in a letter to the Daily News elicited a short correspondence consisting of the British Weekly's leader article, "A Friendly Reply to Dr. Clifford and the Daily News" and Clifford's response, printed on the letters page in the following issue.[45] While welcoming the chastisement from Clifford for remissness in the cause of Nonconformity and "kissing the rod with meekness," the British Weekly did not alter in any way its position on Gorst's proposals.

The point of departure between Clifford and Nicoll was the ability of the existing Board school system to provide an acceptable type of undenominational religious instruction. Clifford believed that by concentrating on

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[43] British Weekly, 16th April 1896.

[44] British Weekly, 30th April 1896.

[45] British Weekly, 16th April 1896, 23rd April 1896.

the Bible, experience had taught that it was possible to "inspire in children attending state schools that religious faith which underlies all our theologies and ecclesiasticisms,...all that is actually fundamental to them, without violating the sacred rights of the human conscience". Having accepted that the Bible provided a basis for truly nonsectarian education, Clifford held that distinctive religious convictions should be left to the teaching in homes, churches and Christian Endeavour societies and therefore had no place in the Board schools. He saw Clause 27 as a way of bringing denominational teaching into these schools.[46] Clifford's criticism of the Bill was therefore unrelenting;

> For myself, forecasting the results of enacting Clause 27 as law, from what I know of the crushing tyranny of the sacerdotal clergy in the rural districts of this country, I cannot imagine anything more mischievous to religion, more fatal to education, or more disastrous to the country.[47]

Price Hughes preached the compromise of undenominational teaching, warning that Free Church commitment to a secular programme would drive Wesleyan Methodists from the Nonconformist camp. Hughes attacked the concept of the State as a wholly secular entity as characteristic of an atheistic value system. The British

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[46] Clifford's biographer shared his subject's views when writing, "...the Bill of 1896 practically repealed the Cowper-Temple clause, and opened the door of the nation's schools to the priests and a doubtful and deceptive advantage - the door of the Anglican schools to Free Churchmen." C.T.Bateman, John Clifford Free Church Leader and Preacher, London 1904.

[47] British Weekly, 23rd April 1896.

Weekly believed that this was to make a fundamental mistake. It argued that, "The State is as divine as the Church, but it belongs to another order, and it is instituted for other ends. When it arrogates functions that pertain to the Church, it becomes in that measure undivine". The British Weekly assailed Hughes' standpoint on two levels: firstly that his proposed methods could not secure their ends - there was not sufficient common ground between Anglicans, Nonconformists and Catholics to facilitate nonsectarian religious instruction; secondly when the State began to teach children religion it abandoned its true sphere. Although Hughes did not agree with Nicoll on the falseness of undenominational Board school religion he did come to the view that if Gorst's Education Bill was passed Nonconformists should make every effort to send Evangelical teachers into the 8,000 Church schools in areas where no Board school existed.[48]

The most militant stand came from the Congregational Union which declared that it would not use Clause 27. Dr. Berry (the Congregational minister from Wolverhampton who was an important figure in the move for Free Church cooperation[49]) claimed an adherence to Congregational principles when he restated his belief that the religious instruction of children was the business of the Churches. The British Weekly did not dispute this but felt that this type of statement did nothing to address the fact that existing religious teaching through Sunday schools was

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[48] British Weekly, 18th June 1896.

[49] Bebbington, Nonconformist Conscience, p.70.

inadequate. The British Weekly disagreed with Dr. Berry in his view that Clause 27 was a blatant but transitory attack on Nonconformity through the School Boards. It believed that the issues which had been raised for Dissenters would not disappear easily. The most important of these being, "the obligation of Nonconformists to face the responsibility of giving their children religious education on weekdays".[50] The British Weekly also believed that the Church had a valid argument with the view that those who wanted religious education in schools must make the effort to provide it and that ministers made better teachers of religion than Board school teachers.[51]

The British Weekly criticised those Nonconformist leaders who opposed the Bill with sentiments which were wholly negative as they appeared to lack confidence in the ability of Dissent to mobilise its forces in the educational arena. In its "Friendly Reply" to Dr. Clifford's criticisms of moderation in the Daily News, the British Weekly argued that, "Fervent denunciations are all right in their place, but much that is being said in criticism [of the Bill] is entirely unpractical". Commenting on the Congregational Union's opposition to the Bill the British Weekly stated:

> The Nonconformist opposition to the measure has been throughout on the whole singularly futile, because it has not been grounded on any true principle. It might have been hoped that the Congregationalists would in some measure recover lost ground, but both Dr. Berry and Mr. Hirst

[50] British Weekly, 21st May 1896.

[51] British Weekly, 30th April 1896.

> Hollowell completely lost their heads, as we have little doubt they will admit when they have had time to think over the matter.[52]

In his address to the Union James Hirst Hollowell, the long time advocate of unsectarian education, told his listeners that if priests were allowed to enter the Board schools Nonconformists should refuse to pay their rates. The British Weekly argued that this was an extremely inappropriate tactic within the context of the 1896 Bill. While it could conceive of circumstances under which Nonconformists should refuse to pay rates, this was an action of the last resort, "Obedience to the law, save under the absolute compulsion of conscience, is our rule".[53] If such a revolt could be deemed necessary, the British Weekly argued, it should be well organised and so clearly justified that it commended itself to all fair minded men. According to Nicoll and his newspaper these conditions would not be met by Gorst's Bill. Nonconformists were not of one mind on the matter and the British Weekly felt that resistance to the law was a very serious and dangerous game which two could play. It warned:

> Unless our consciences are outraged, we must submit, and wait for a better time. We shall be in a majority again, and then others, our opponents, will have to accept legislation they do not like.[54]

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[52] British Weekly, 21st May 1896.

[53] British Weekly, 21st May 1896.

[54] British Weekly, 21st May 1896.

In one sense the British Weekly may have been trying to second guess the Unionist Government and its Anglican and Roman Catholic supporters. In declaring his certainty that it was "those who have called for this clause most who will most regret that it ever...passed," Nicoll may have been protesting too much.[55] Indeed the British Weekly occasionally suggested such a tactical strategy. It warned its readers that Nonconformists' complaints about the Act would only serve to convince Anglicans that great advantages were to be gained from its passing.[56] The British Weekly also assured those who maintained they would not use Clause 27 that one thing which would pre-empt the measure was the fear that Nonconformists would use it.[57] It is only through comparison with the British Weekly's responses to the education proposals of 1901 and 1902 that a true understanding of Nicoll's position can be reached.

The 1896 Education Bill was withdrawn on 19th June due to both a lack of time and commitment on the part of the Government. Salisbury explained to the Queen that the Bill had been "exceptionally complicated" and had undergone "unexampled obstruction" but its abandonment was nevertheless a great embarrassment to an apparently strong Government.[58] The memory of the climb down was still fresh in the minds of Unionists and Nonconformists when the

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[55] British Weekly, 14th May 1896.

[56] British Weekly, 23rd April 1896.

[57] British Weekly, 21st May 1896.

[58] Salisbury to Queen Victoria, 22nd June 1896, CAB 41/23/59, in Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.620.

Government came to address education in 1901 and 1902. It encouraged a more inflexible attitude among both the more Radical Free Church leaders and High Church Conservative back benchers forcing Arthur Balfour to attempt to conciliate between two irreconcilables. By March 1902 both Balfour and the Duke of Devonshire thought the question of education would "wreck the Government".[59]

iii. The Education Bill of 1901:

In July 1899 T.B. Cockerton, auditor of the Local Government Board, ruled that it was illegal for Board schools to provide secondary education out of rates raised for elementary education. This focused attention on the formerly acceptable practice of State schools extending their educational facilities to incorporate the technical and secondary levels without official recognition. Once this legally dubious practice was challenged the Government was forced to look at the generally inadequate nature of the country's secondary education. An Appeal against the Cockerton judgement delayed the need for immediate action until April 1901 when Cockerton's case was upheld. The re-elected Unionist Government could not escape another wrangle over education.

Gorst introduced the Government's hurried response on 7th May 1901. He stated that its object was "to establish

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[59] 1st March 1902, Fitzroy, Memoirs I, in Munson, "Passive Resistance," p.105.

in every part of England and Wales, a local education authority for the supervision of education of every kind". He hoped that this authority might eventually have control over all schools - elementary, secondary and technical.[60] The Bill was to some extent a regurgitation of the 1896 measure stripped of its provisions for elementary schools.[61] Gorst worked on the premise that a consensus existed in favour of the establishment of a local authority which, having control over both primary and secondary education, would be able to form a plan for the general public education of its district suitable to the needs of the population.[62] It was proposed that the education authorities would exercise their duties through a committee. Each locality was given the freedom to determine the structure of its committee with only two Governmental stipulations: the majority should consist of members of the council or where relevant of the excised boroughs and in every case there should be members on the committee who were not members of the county council. The exact ratio was a matter for the individual local authorities and their proposed schemes were to be published before they could be approved.[63] Funding for the committee was to be provided by the county council from local taxation money. The county council also had the power to

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[60] Times, 8th May 1901.

[61] Munson, "Passive Resistance," pp.79-80.

[62] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.xcii, 29th April - 13th May 1901, col.971.

[63] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.xciii, col.977.

levy a rate which was to be restricted in the Bill for the initial period to 2d. The School Board rate was not to be touched by the Bill.[64]

Gorst claimed there was very little importance in the conscience clause as it related to secondary education and his references to religious freedom were stated simply. It was proposed that;

> the following condition should be imposed upon all schools which are aided, established, or maintained out of this money [local income tax and possible rate levied by the county council]. First of all, there is to be no condition of making a grant, that any particular kind of religion is or is not taught in a school; and, secondly, the parents of every scholar are to have the power to withdraw him or her from any religious observance or religious instruction, and, the hours of religious teaching and religious observance are to be so arranged as to make the withdrawal as convenient as possible.[65]

This clause provided the county councils with the right to assist denominational schools with the proviso that no pupil would be under any obligation to attend religious classes. The operation of the Cowper-Temple Clause after 1870 had revealed that it was in fact rare for parents to take a stand, fearing the possible detrimental effect on children. An opting-in rather than opting-out clause would undoubtedly have been more effective from a Nonconformist point of view. However the muted response (inside and outwith the House of Commons) to the Bill's conscience clause suggests that many shared Gorst's view

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[64] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.xciii, col.978.

[65] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.xciii, cols.1980-1.

that the religious make up of secondary schools was not as vital an issue as it was in the elementary sector. Although Munson has noted that contemporaries regarded the Bill as, "inconsequential and ill-timed attempting to do too little too late in the session" immediate reaction to the Bill was more encouraging.[66]

Dr. Macnamara M.P., former President of the N.U.T., was agreeably surprised that the Government had brought in the Bill so quickly but felt that it had failed in its primary task of unifying and consolidating the local authorities within suitable areas for educational purposes. Despite the Government's good intentions he argued that in failing to deal with elementary education it had essentially undermined its main aim.[67] Gorst had of course explained that while the Bill did not attempt to transfer the power of the existing elementary education authority - the School Boards - it represented the first step towards a greater unity of authority, which could only be achieved through a structure like the L.E.A. Gorst's proposals assumed the later transfer of the Board Schools to the control of the new local authorities.[68]

Bryce, in his reply to the Bill, stated that as it was desirable to remove the anomalies in the existing education system the Opposition would consider the proposals in a fair spirit so long as nothing was done to encourage the sectarian controversy which had done so much to retard

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[66] Munson, "Passive Resistance," p.79.

[67] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.xcii, cols.993-4.

[68] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.xcii, col.989.

progress in the past.[69] This will to support the Government was echoed in the Times which stated that the Bill, "if not in all respects adequate to the education opportunity and the expectations of those most interested in the question, appears to be an honest attempt, more welcome because too long deferred, to introduce something like harmony into chaos".[70] The Times encapsulated widespread opinion in describing the Bill as no more than a "well-meant instalment in a matter of great national urgency".[71]

On 9th May 1901 the British Weekly noted that the Bill had been introduced but confessed that "much of it was obscure, and criticism must be postponed" until the full text had been made available.[72] The Bill was not again referred to in its columns until the 20th June when the British Weekly congratulated Price Hughes on his article in the Daily Chronicle in which he spoke "the convictions of the vast majority of Free Churchmen" on the new Education Bill. The British Weekly summarised Hughes' opposition to Gorst's proposal in three points: (1) it substituted a responsible and representative educational authority with a nonrepresentative and irresponsible educational authority; (2) it proposed to abolish representative School Boards even in the case of elementary education; (3) it proposed to sweep away existing safeguards against the use of rates

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[69] Times, 8th May 1901.

[70] Times, 8th May 1901.

[71] Times, 8th May 1901.

[72] British Weekly, 9th May 1901.

to endow sectarian and privately managed schools, day schools and boarding, primary and secondary.

The British Weekly's response was surprisingly vehement. It declared, "If this Bill were forced through Parliament Free Churchmen would be bound to resist it even to the extent of refusing to pay the rates. This is the position we have always taken, and we are fully persuaded that Free Churchmen if forced to it would not shrink from the conflict". The British Weekly agreed with Hughes that bitter sectarian conflict over education was unfortunate at a time when the Empire was in danger but argued that the battle had been provoked by clerical friends and supporters of the Cecil Government.[73]

This was the first time a "major force" in Nonconformity advocated passive resistance as part of the educational struggle.[74] Munson has suggested that the important change in circumstances which forced Nicoll to revise his position in June 1901 was that his "1896 faith in the inevitable Liberal victory had been shattered by the divisions within the party over the [Boer] war and the 1900 "Khaki" victory for the government".[75] This reading of Nicoll reinforces Munson's argument that for some Free Church leaders mobilisation of the "Nonconformist conscience" through the passive resistance movement was influenced by political as well as religious imperatives.

However Nicoll's call for passive resistance in 1901

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[73] British Weekly, 20th June 1901.

[74] Munson, "Passive Resistance," p.82.

[75] Munson, "Passive Resistance," p.82.

came from the fear, which re-emerged in 1902, that secular education would be subsidised by rates. The 1896 Bill had proposed forcing all denominations to provide the money and ministers for their own religious instruction in all schools. The 1901 Bill did not allow for Nonconformist religious teaching in the Voluntary schools and it did not safeguard the rates from being used for denominational teaching. Therefore without altering the structure in a way which the British Weekly might conceivably see as advantageous to Nonconformists, the 1901 Bill upheld the denominational exclusiveness of Voluntary schools. Alongside this was the double blow of depriving the Free Churches of possible democratic control over State funded schools and releasing rate aid to the autonomous Voluntary sector.

Yet despite the tone of its response to Hughes' article in the Daily Chronicle, Nicoll's call to Nonconformists to defend their educational interests was not on the front page. It was placed in the "Notes of the Week" section, at the end of the relatively long piece on Hughes; Nicoll's call to arms was almost hidden.[76] It seems likely that the British Weekly suspected that the Bill would not be processed due to the restrictions of time and this is why it gave no mention of the Bill until six weeks after it had been introduced. Indeed the day after the first reading of the Bill in Parliament the Times

[76] The tone of the piece undoubtedly has a lot to do with Nicoll's habit of dictating much of the British Weekly to his secretary. The article reads like someone becoming increasingly agitated the more he pursued the implications of the Bill.

commented that due to the state of public business it had small chance of becoming law in the present session.[77]

Nicoll took the opportunity afforded by Hughes' publicity to record his dislike of the Bill and to leave the Government in no doubt that any further educational measures would have to consider very seriously Nonconformist objections. Although the Bill did not alarm many observers because it did not tackle elementary education, the British Weekly would have been in no doubt that it made the gradual assumption of primary schools into the sphere of the L.E.A.'s inevitable.

Nicoll's criticism of the Congregational Union's opposition to the 1896 Bill that it "had not been grounded on any true principle" was reminiscent of the British Weekly's advice to the labour movement in November 1891. It warned, "don't strike unless your strike will be successful. When you do let it be a big thing, on such simple definite grounds as shall carry popular sympathy with you. If you fail, in great part the suffering entailed will be yours".[78] As the editor of a national weekly Nicoll felt the full weight of his responsibility towards his readership. He knew that by encouraging his readers to break the law he would have to bear some responsibility for their subsequent suffering. He also knew that unless it was possible to focus the public's attention on a single, clear-cut issue (like Rome on the rates) it would be very difficult to initiate and sustain a

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[77] Times, 8th May 1901.

[78] British Weekly, 21st May 1896, 5th November 1891.

campaign which enjoyed widespread support.

iv. The Education Act of 1902:

The Baptist M.P. George White was first to resurrect the idea of non-payment of rates in the education debate of 1902.[79] His plea for passive resistance was carried in the March edition of the monthly magazine The Light of Home and was published before the first reading of the Education Bill on 24th of that month.[80] This symbolised the rigidity of Radical Nonconformists who were predisposed to oppose the Bill before knowing its contents. The British Weekly's reaction to the limited Education Bill of 1901 had revealed a similar predetermined hostility to the 1902 Bill. It had warned, "Liberals will strenuously resist the short Bill this session, but the real storm will burst when another foolish, elaborate, and highly contentious measure is laid before the country this year".[81]

The National Free Church Council which met in Bradford in March 1902, addressed the effects of the education crisis. Perks outlined the two demands on which Nonconformists and the Liberal party would agree: that all grades of education be under the control of one directly elected authority and that public money should not be

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[79] Darlow, op.cit., p.379.

[80] Light of Home, March 1902, in Munson, Nonconformists, p.255.

[81] British Weekly, 4th July 1901.

granted without popular control. Hirst Hollowell called on the Government to hold another General Election before bringing in an Education Bill. He asserted that the Unionists by their own admission had been elected with the single mandate of settling the problem in South Africa. The British Weekly agreed with this view but reported that the effect of Hirst Hollowell's speech was marred by his cry that it was a terrible outrage that Nonconformists should be threatened with a clerical Education Bill in Coronation year. Clifford's words also foretold the emotive nature of his future debate. He declared it high time "that the process of turning little Nonconformists into Anglicans at the public expense should cease".[82] Nonconformists had drawn the battle lines before the Bill had been read.

Balfour was aware of the peril of underestimating the wrath of the "Nonconformist conscience" and he reminded the Commons, "Nobody can be more impressed than I am with the difficulty of the task which the Government have undertaken".[83] The Bill's uneasy and often painful gestation was the result of the need to satisfy Unionist backbenchers (impatient after the 1901 debacle) without unnecessarily upsetting Dissenting Liberals and Liberal Unionists. The Bill as it appeared in the Commons on 24th March was therefore a compromise which proposed to deal with "secondary and primary education in one measure with

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[82] British Weekly, 20th March 1902.

[83] Parliamentary Debates, Volume CV, 14th March - 10th April 1902, 24th March 1902, col.846.

the view to their better coordination".[84]

The 1902 Bill was not dissimilar to its 1901 predecessor but had the advantage that the Government was determined to see it through the Commons. In place of the dual system of School Boards and County and Borough County Councils the Government proposed setting up a single authority (L.E.A's) for all levels of education which would be responsible for raising a limited educational rate. L.E.A.s were also to be given responsibility for the training of teachers. Balfour defended his intention to assist denominational institutions reminding the Commons of the absurdity of starving them of funds while they provided for the education of the majority of children in the country. Two final aims of the Education Bill were the eradication of denominational squabbles in local and municipal life; and that the education authority should have at its disposal all the educational skills of the district.[85]

The L.E.A.s - the County Councils in counties and Borough Councils in county boroughs - were to operate through committees. These committees were to have a majority of members nominated by the Council. The powers of the committees were far reaching. Balfour stated that whether schools were Voluntary or rate erected, "in future, if this Bill becomes law, the local education authority...will be absolute master of the whole scheme of secular education in every elementary school in its

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[84] Parliamentary Debates, Vol. CV, col.846.

[85] Parliamentary Debates, Vol. CV, cols.850-7.

district, voluntary or otherwise".[86]

The L.E.A.s were to inherit the powers of the School Boards over all rate-erected schools. In Voluntary schools it was proposed that their new jurisdiction would include the power to appoint one third of the managers, the duty of inspection and the power to refuse on educational grounds the appointment of any teacher. Alongside these new powers, the L.E.A.s had to adopt responsibility for the maintenance of buildings.[87] The Bill also proposed to abolish the legislation which in effect allowed schools - Voluntary or Board - which had a sufficient number of places for the district, to block the building of a new school in their area, taking no account of the will of parents and ratepayers. Balfour suggested that "common sense, the needs of the economy, and the difficulty of finding the necessary funds" would provide a check on the unnecessary building of new schools.[88] The Bill in its original form had two limitations: it did not apply to London and it made optional the Local Council's new responsibility for elementary education. This local option clause was justified by the belief that authorities aware of the advantages of the Bill, would adopt its measures more effectively without duress.[89]

Balfour anticipated the camps which would find fault with his Bill: ardent believers in School Boards, militant

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[86] Parliamentary Debates, Vol. CV, cols.858-9.

[87] Parliamentary Debates, Vol. CV, col.859.

[88] Parliamentary Debates, Vol. CV, col.861.

[89] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.CV, cols.862-3.

denominationalists, and militant anti-denominationalists. The third group was clearly the most difficult to appease. Balfour recognised two unanswerable educational grievances in the position of Nonconformists. The first, the problem of single-school districts where Anglicans or Roman Catholics held the monopoly, was to be countered with the legislation allowing a new school to be built where there was enough demand from parents. The second problem was the difficulty of entering the teaching profession in areas where single Church schools existed. The Government proposed that by creating a Local Education Authority which would have the power to deal with the whole question of education (including the provision of teachers) the grievances if not removed would be largely mitigated. Therefore Balfour hoped that militant Nonconformists would "look with less malevolent eyes" on the proposed educational reform.[90]

Balfour's call to his countrymen to enable him to, "put aside for ever...barren controversies which for too long have occupied our time", temporarily wrong-footed the Liberal Opposition which had to be seen to consider the Bill with a bipartisan mind.[91] Campbell-Bannerman promised a favourable reception for the Bill in the House if it was truly calculated to promote the interests of education. But he warned that if the Bill eroded the real popular control and management of schools and was simply an effort to improve the conditions of Voluntary schools then the

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[90] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.CV, Cols.866-7.

[91] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.CV, col.868.

Government would face difficulty in getting it through.[92]

The British Weekly took its cue from Campbell-Bannerman and noted the wisdom of reserving judgement until the Bill could be studied in detail. Despite suggesting to its readership that the more Balfour's speech was examined the more obscure were the Government's provisions and proposals, the British Weekly offered some observations. The first consequence of the Bill was the inevitable rise in the rates. It calculated that the Government's proposals would add a further £3,000,000 to the cost of education. The size of county districts would make it impossible for Councils to provide adequate supervision for all schools, resulting in the continued management of many Voluntary schools by parsons, given the fact that most County Councils were Tory-dominated. On a practical level the British Weekly thought impending extinction would make impossible the position of School Boards which were maintained through the local option clause.[93]

The British Weekly then addressed the Bill's provision for Nonconformists. It conceded that Balfour deserved credit for recognising the grievances of Dissenters but had doubts that his scheme would provide any remedies. It seemed unlikely that Nonconformists would accept partial provision for control of the Voluntary schools, having no guarantee that the quota of managers appointed by the Council would be sympathetic to the Free Church view. The British Weekly thought Balfour's legislation which allowed

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[92] Parliamentary Debates, Vol.CV, cols.869-871.

[93] British Weekly, 27th March 1902.

parents to have a second school built in single school areas was less than satisfactory. Nonconformists would be forced to have extra schools erected in order to protect their children from sectarian attack and to give jobs to those Dissenters who were in the teaching profession. However Nonconformists would act reluctantly, never having advocated the separation of children in their early years.

Therefore the British Weekly argued that all Nonconformists must endeavour to secure a truly popular control of schools. If however the Government used its enormous power to drive the Bill through, Nonconformists could not avoid joint action. Despite claiming that all immediate criticism of the Bill was made with the utmost reserve, the British Weekly remarked that there was, "at least, an opportunity of manifesting the unity and strength of the Liberal party. Their first effort must be to see that no sectarian interest is served by the new proposals".[94]

Nicoll's tentative response to the first reading of the Education Bill concentrated on a desire to see parliamentary opposition by the Liberal party. The salient points to which the British Weekly drew attention were increased rates and the lack of popular control implied in the Bill. No mention was made of "Rome on the rates". In part, this was due to Nicoll's desire to take the time to examine the Bill properly before committing the British Weekly to an attack which was only partly considered. It was also born of the desire to attract support from a

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[94] British Weekly, 27th March 1902.

broader area than radical Nonconformity. Nicoll examined the Bill, the Liberal party's response and the attitude of the Liberal press before making his emotional plea to Free Churchmen to resist the education reforms.

Nicoll has been criticised for his hesitant response to Balfour's proposed legislation. It has been suggested that Nicoll's deliberation over the Bill's contents is evidence that he was taking political, secular soundings rather than reacting to the voice of his conscience.[95] He is further implicated by his support for Lloyd George. Initially Lloyd George was "not unfavourably impressed with the Bill, judging it from a purely Welsh point of view". But he conceded, "I am assured by English members that the Bill will be a bad thing for England...There may be parts of the Bill which I cannot agree with, and, until I have seen it in print, I must reserve further opinion".[96] Lloyd George then took his cue from more militant voices such as the Daily News and John Clifford rather than risk losing his position as a spokesman for the Free Churches.[97] Given his Little England past, it was also "helpful to Lloyd George to be reconciled by a good sectarian issue with fellow-Liberals who supported the Boer War".[98]

Munson sees Nicoll's response in similar terms to that of the Welsh M.P. He has argued that to both the Bill

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[95] Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.638.

[96] Western Mail, 25th March 1902, Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., A/10/2/12.

[97] J.Grigg, Lloyd George: the people's champion, 1902-1911, London, 1978, p.26.

[98] Grigg, People's Champion, p.27.

offered, "a golden opportunity for a joint Liberal-Nonconformist campaign against the government. (Both men had initially far less hostile view towards the bill.)"[99] This culpability by association is not a satisfactory judgement of Nicoll. It is true that Nicoll came relatively slowly to the furore in 1902 but he was not inconsistent.

As Nicoll was one of the central characters in the drive for passive resistance his motivation has significance. If Nicoll was not primarily driven by his religious beliefs this implicates the passive resistance movement as a victim of political opportunism. Contemporaries were well aware of the association between opposition to the Education Act and the political Liberal party. Indeed the Coventry Herald and Free Press stated in 1903 that, "The organisation of conscience becomes in part at least an organisation of political forces".[100] Munson's study reveals an often conscious link between the campaign for religious freedom in education and political opposition to the Government. He notes that many Leagues were called Citizens' Leagues, with the emphasis on political rather than religious aims.[101]

> It would be simplistic to argue that clever manipulators in London - Nicoll, Lloyd George, Thomas Law, and Sears - manipulated the simple faith of provincial Nonconformists for political

[99] Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.638.

[100] Coventry Herald and Free Press, 8th May 1903, in Munson, Nonconformists, p.266.

[101] Munson, Nonconformists, p.266.

> ends because Registers were perfectly aware that in politics religious beliefs mattered, whether Nonconformist, Anglican or Roman Catholic. This was especially the case concerning education. In all honesty they argued that their aim was not so much political but parliamentary while their motives were religious because based in conscience.[102]

Nevertheless Munson has referred to Nicoll's call for passive resistance in opposition to the Unionists' 1901 education proposals as an action which served "merely to strengthen the Liberal opposition".[103] He groups Nicoll with the band of "clever manipulators in London" without properly examining Nicoll's individual relationship with the Liberal party or indeed Nonconformity. Of passive resistance Munson says, "While it would prove an effective weapon against the Tories, it was not a truly conscientious movement unless we assume that men's consciences can be organized by a triumvirate of Nicoll, Clifford and Sears...While not discrediting those who felt they were acting from honourable motives, we must admit that they were to a degree manipulated by Nicoll and Sears if not by John Clifford.[104]

Nicoll did not address the paradox of putting pressure on Free Churchmen to look to their conscience while preaching that they had a duty to reach a certain conclusion. A.M. Fairbairn would not take part in the no-rate campaign because he believed that external

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[102] Munson, Nonconformists, pp.266-7.

[103] Munson, Nonconformists, p.253.

[104] Munson, Nonconformists, p.275.

organisation negated the role of the individual conscience.[105] But Munson's examination of the extent to which Nicoll's actions were tempered by political concerns is too obsessed with party politics. Nicoll saw the Liberal party as a vehicle for Nonconformists demands. If he hoped that the movement against the Education Bill would assist the Liberals in the short term it was so that they could serve Nonconformist interests in the longer term. Nicoll's consistent political aspiration was religious equality not simply the electoral success of the Liberals.

Nicoll's hesitancy over the Bill was not lengthy. On the 3rd April the British Weekly published its leader, "The Duty of Nonconformists," stating that:

> The more closely the Education Bill is examined the clearer appears the duty of resisting it at all costs, and to the last extremity. It is a Bill avowedly introduced to save the Church schools. It hardly meets in any way the educational necessities of England. It will, if passed, involve the country in tremendous expenses...The extraordinary confusion of the arrangement is almost incredible.[106]

Initially, therefore, the British Weekly appealed as much to common sense as to conscience. Although the viewpoint that the Bill was ultimately an inefficient measure was questionable, it was a legitimate concern given the wide reaching effects of the Unionist legislation. As an alternative to Balfour's proposal, the British Weekly suggested that what the country needed was the enlargement

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[105] Munson, Nonconformists, p.259.

[106] British Weekly, 3rd April 1902.

of local School Board areas, the development of higher grade schools as a bridge to a system of secular education, the elimination of inefficient schools and popular control at every point. The list was more vague than Balfour's "bird's eye view" of the Education Bill and showed no awareness of the difficulty of fulfilling these aims. Nevertheless the British Weekly reiterated that the present Bill would open up "the prospect of inextricable confusion, hopeless inefficiency, and enormous and unbearable expense".[107]

Ultimately the British Weekly was primarily concerned with the Bill's effect on Nonconformists. It argued that Balfour's attempt to alleviate the educational grievances of the Free Churches would only serve to exacerbate them. It was unrealistic to suppose that rural districts with declining populations would be able to bear the burden of two half-filled schools or that Nonconformists would incur the wrath of their neighbours by compelling them to submit to additional tax for rate aided schools. The British Weekly also noted the unfairness of Nonconformists being taxed alike for Church schools and others and the fact that the Church party could divert money saved from subscriptions to the building of new Voluntary schools which would then have to be maintained by the rates. Therefore while Church schools would thrive under the new Bill Nonconformists would find themselves taxed to support "a religious propagandism of which they conscientiously disapprove[d]". The British Weekly therefore declared the

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[107] British Weekly, 3rd April 1902.

Bill "the very worst Education Bill ever proposed".[108]

Despite Nonconformist antagonism, there was little hope that the Bill would be rejected by the Commons; the Unionists had a majority and could rely on the support of Irish M.P.s. Therefore Nonconformists had to consider possible action once the Bill had become law. The British Weekly readership was left in no doubt of the action they were being urged to follow: "If this Bill is passed in its present form, we as ratepayers must allow our property to be seized for the school rate, but we cannot conscientiously pay it...There is no occasion for excited talk, but for serious deliberate warning. The responsibility for giving such warning is much less than the responsibility of withholding it".[109]

The British Weekly reiterated its condemnation of the link between Church and State and was opposed to the State funding the teaching of Christianity either in Church or school. It also restated the belief that it was a "great calamity" that the position of secular educationalists like R.W. Dale had been abandoned by the Free Churches in favour of undenominationalism. The British Weekly still looked unfavourably on this brand of religious teaching, which operated in the Board schools but now accepted that it was preferable to the increased sectarianism being condoned by Balfour. As an alternative to the 1902 Unionist legislation, the British Weekly advocated proposals not dissimilar to those floated by the Government in 1896. The

[108] British Weekly, 3rd April 1902.

[109] British Weekly, 3rd April 1902.

newspaper cited as a more favourable system one in which all schools were under popular control and clergy and ministers of all denominations had the right to give half an hour's religious instruction to pupils. Although the British Weekly did not offer this as a complete solution it noted that, "provided that representation goes with taxation, and that each has an equal opportunity, there is no outrage of justice. Besides, in this way the country would be saved from the hateful necessity of building useless schools".[110]

Opposition to the Bill was also agreed at a meeting of the Free Church leaders at the Memorial Hall on 27th March. Thomas Law stated that the Free Church leaders were against the Bill because it represented an attempt to "disturb and suppress" the School Boards, and it provided for the maintenance of Voluntary schools out of the rates, unaccompanied by real popular control. As a precursor of the British Weekly's sentiment he called the Bill, "the most retrograde educational measure introduced into the House of Commons within living memory". Law saw the first duty of Nonconformists to be opposition to the Bill without compromise. If passed, they might have to work with it by forcing the building of nonsectarian schools but this was to be a last resort. Whatever the outcome, Law was certain that the Bill would unite all the Free Churches in opposition.[111]

Within three weeks of the Bill being read the British

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[110] British Weekly, 3rd April 1902.

[111] British Weekly, 3rd April 1902.

Weekly became one of the leading passive resistance journals. A leader, "The Last Resort", combined a practical approach to organised opposition with an emotional appeal to Nonconformist loyalty. In contrast to previous coverage of the Bill which laid stress on inefficiency and expense, the article abandoned any attempt to outdo the educationalists. It stated, "We are Nonconformists first and Educationalists afterwards, and as Nonconformists our main business is to see that the elementary principles of religious freedom are respected". The British Weekly posed the question to its readers, "do proposals of the Bill touch our conscience?" - given that the Bill dealt the deadliest blow to the very existence and future of Nonconformity and would practically hand over the children of the nation to the Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy.[112] The call for passive resistance quickly became referred to as the "line" of the British Weekly and Nicoll, as one of its primary apologists, felt bound to examine the implications.[113] The British Weekly's rationalisation of the movement against the Education Act showed an awareness of the criticisms which might be levelled at its organisers. The explanation for the necessity of illegal action revealed a defensiveness which suggested that the British Weekly was aware that the appeal to the Nonconformist conscience was tenuous. It recognised

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[112] British Weekly, 10th April 1902.

[113] The Westminster Gazette referred to Dr.Parker's support for passive resistance as following the line of the British Weekly. At a Baptist Conference the members stated their agreement with the British Weekly in supporting the campaign against the Education Act. British Weekly, 10th April 1902.

two possible objections to passive resistance; that it was unwise to make such extreme declarations before other measures had been tried, and that nonpayment of rates itself was a very strong step to take. In reply to the former the British Weekly stated that if consciences were invaded by these proposals Nonconformists must - in fairness to themselves and their opponents - make this known at the earliest opportunity. If this was not made clear, the British Weekly feared, the opposition would claim that conscience had nothing to do with the matter. Despite the dubious nature of a direct prompt from Protestant leaders to individuals, the British Weekly was unrelenting in its insistence that the issue was one of conscience. The call to conscience deliberately alienated those outside Radical Dissent. The British Weekly underlined this;

> There is a sharp distinction between those who look at the Bill as bad from an educational point of view, and those who look at it as outraging the principles of religious liberty. Bad from the educational point of view we believe it to be, but opposition on that ground is one thing, and opposition on the ground of conscience quite another thing, infinitely more serious, involving quite other necessities of resistance.[114]

Passive resistance was also very much in keeping with the tradition of middle class martyrdom inherent in Nonconformity and the ethos of suffering for religion.[115] There can be little doubt that Nicoll used the campaign

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[114] British Weekly, 10th April 1902.

[115] Munson, Nonconformists, pp.267, 265.

against the Education Act as a way of consolidating turn of the century Nonconformity. The British Weekly carried a report of a meeting of the London Congregational Union stating that although the Union was firmly opposed to the Education Bill, younger members were not behind the veterans in zeal.[116] The fear that the campaign for religious equality was dying among young Nonconformists was a constant theme in the British Weekly. A worry which had nagged at Nicoll during the 1890s became a prominent concern during the Education controversy. The British Weekly feared the end of the old Nonconformist spirit, killed by "the growing indifference of the country, and the alienation of the masses from public worship". This apathy, the British Weekly believed, had prompted Nonconformists to "refrain from aggressive action against the Establishment, and concentrate their energies on a great work of evangelisation".[117]

Free Church leaders often referred to tradition in order to remind Nonconformists of their duty to oppose an attack on religious freedom and therefore keep the flame of radical Nonconformity alive. The M.P. A.E. Hutton stated that if Nonconformity quietly accepted the Education Bill then, "truly we must be a people ignorant of our principles, careless of our duty, and unworthy of our heritage". Clifford also attempted to tap into the cultural memory of the Free Churches stating, "The older folk who remember the great struggles of our past are ready

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[116] British Weekly, 10th April 1902.

[117] British Weekly, 8th May 1902.

to repeat the sacrifices of our fathers".[118]

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed the paradox of growing secularism with an increase in Anglican assertiveness and Nonconformists pitted themselves against both forces. Clearly the campaign of passive resistance was a show of strength on the part of committed Nonconformists. Once the battle against Anglican hegemony in schools had begun the absolute desire of the Free Churches to win led to extremism. Indeed as early as April 1902 the Free Church Conference on Education agreed unanimously that the Bill should be ended, not amended. The British Weekly was spurred on by the belief that in journals like the Times the possibility of Nonconformists effectively fighting the Education reforms was not taken seriously.[119]

The Bill received its second reading in mid May 1902 and was passed by 402 votes to 165. Parliamentary opposition was apparently futile and the British Weekly had to maintain its efforts to gather the extra-Parliamentary forces of the Free Churches. In the face of political hopelessness it assured its readership that, "Enthusiasm is invariably stirred to vehemence whenever the refusal to pay rates if the Bill is passed is even so much as hinted at. The ancient spirit of zeal for freedom is rapidly reviving and will soon be at its height".[120]

Behind the emotive words was the realisation that

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[118] British Weekly, 14th April 1902.

[119] British Weekly, 8th May 1902.

[120] British Weekly, 15th May 1902.

effective political action is not accidental and the British Weekly outlined the immediate duty of Nonconformists as three-fold: to fight the Bill inch by inch in Parliament; to keep up the movement in the country and to ensure that they were thoroughly prepared for the battle. Nicoll was determined that the mobilisation of the Nonconformist conscience was not spiritual and abstract. His newspaper argued for the, "organisation of our forces. Very soon we shall have to mobilise them. Money will be needed as well as leadership".[121]

v. The Response of the Liberal Party:

Liberal M.P.s had tentatively backed the Nonconformist campaign against the Education Bill. The Liberal leadership agreed to attack the reform on "the Rating question without popular control", and therefore stood somewhat apart from the Nonconformists and their religious objections. The Free Church reaction to Balfour's Bill was a "mixed blessing" to the Liberal party. The Education Bill served as a way of uniting Liberals around a traditional rallying point. It was a welcome source of unity in the light of the Boer War divisions but was also dangerously mixed up with Nonconformity and illegality. The Liberal party did not want to be seen to be the tool of the Free Churches any more than it wanted to seem to

[121] British Weekly, 15th May 1902.

condone breaking the law.[122]

This equivocal response made it more difficult to organize the opposition. In July Lloyd George wrote to Nicoll in an attempt to "coordinate" the fight against the Education Bill. He felt that there, "ought to be a more complete understanding between those who conduct the campaign in the country and the Members who fight the Bill in the Commons". Lloyd George wanted Hughes, Nicoll and Clifford to meet with a few of the more active Nonconformists in the House to discuss the situation. He warned that success or failure depended entirely on the events of the coming months, "The House of Commons is not yet convinced that the Nonconformists in any part of the country except Wales mean business".[123]

James Denney was also concerned about the lack of leadership among both the Free Churches and Liberals. He feared that the Liberal party was an ineffective instrument as it did not "naturally care for spiritual religion as the Tory party naturally cares for the Established Church, so that in the field of action the Nonconformists have all the advantages against them. I am afraid", he concluded, "unless it comes as you suggest to fines and imprisonments all over, they will be trampled on".[124]

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[122] Munson, Nonconformists, pp.256, 257.

[123] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 19th July 1902, Nicoll Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS.15941, f.14.

[124] Denney to Nicoll, 29th July 1902. Denney wrote again in the autumn, "If any man is entitled to the credit of the national movement [against the Education Bill] it is you, and one could only wish for Liberalism a leader with any principle or backbone to take the guidance of it. The other side are strong only because we are weak..." Denney to Nicoll, 16th October 1902, in

The British Weekly wasted little time in increasing its efforts to mobilise Nonconformist forces and on 31st July it published its famous leader, "Set Down My Name, Sir," a quote taken from Pilgrim's Progress, which urged Free Churchmen to register as Resisters.[125] In September Lloyd George followed his prompt to Nicoll that, "A hint from you will set all the machinery in motion," with an open letter to the editor in the British Weekly. He urged Nicoll to use his "great influence with the fighting forces of Nonconformity...for action in the forthcoming municipal contests in England and Wales".[126] These elections represented an opportunity to demonstrate the unpopularity of the Education Bill and, Lloyd George argued, the chance to have opponents of the Bill represented in the County Councils.[127]

The Liberal League section of the party found opposition to the Bill more complicated. Haldane published Education and Empire, a collection of his speeches arguing for the greater organisation of education at all levels. R.L. Morant believed that Haldane had, "said what needed saying over and over again...I sympathise with your impatience at the smallness of vision which seems always to

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October 1902, in Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.27, p.28.

[125] The same title was given to a pamphlet published by Nicoll some years later which called on men to volunteer for service in the First World War. Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[126] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 8th September 1902, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., British Weekly, 11th September 1902, Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., A/10/2/29.

[127] British Weekly, 11th September 1902, Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., A/10/2/29.

limit our education rulers..."[128] Sidney Webb had alienated the radical Nonconformists by helping to draft the Bill and then giving it his support and Rosebery was slow in his opposition. Wemyss Reid prompted, "There is no doubt that the Education Bill is the question of the day but you [Rosebery] will fight it in your own way. Still an early utterance on it would not do any harm".[129] Even Asquith was judged to have "worked himself into an unreal opposition...not really convinced of the iniquity or unwisdom of the bill he [was] denouncing".[130] Although Nicoll joined the League four months after the Education Bill had been introduced, he was unhappy that it included members who saw themselves as educationalists. Nicoll warned Perks that the Liberal League in Scotland had been "seriously damaged" by Haldane and Munro Ferguson and urged that the General Council make "a clear expression of opinion" on the Education Bill when it next met.[131]

The expression given to the League's opinion owed more to Webb than to the Nonconformists. Reid told Rosebery of attempts to draft a resolution on the Bill which received the approval of Perks and Paulton.[132] However a meeting three days later of the League's publications committee

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[128] Morant to Haldane, 25th May 1902, Haldane Papers, N.L.S., MS.5905, ff.175-6.

[129] Wemyss Reid to Rosebery, 10th September 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., Ms.10058, f.45.

[130] 28th November 1902, Webb, Diary Volume Two, p.263.

[131] Nicoll to Perks, 14th October 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.22.

[132] Wemyss Reid to Rosebery, 20th October 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10058, f.56.

"resolved itself...into a sitting of the other members at the feet of Sidney Webb, who gave...a great deal of good advice in very strong language". Webb's own resolution was accepted after he threatened to introduce an amendment if Reid's original proposal was moved at the meeting of the General Council the following day. "We all think that it would be a very good thing if we could ensure union tomorrow by adopting this resolution instead of the original one," Reid finished "It is not so strong of course but I think it contains everything that is essential".[133]

Reid recognised the potential of the education question as an effective jolt to the Liberal party fortunes, particularly if the sectarian element was not stressed. In November 1902 he urged Rosebery to take the chief role in opposing the Bill in the Lords. "My own feeling," he wrote, "is one of amazement that the official Liberals (both Parliament Street & the Federation) have not organized demonstrations in the great towns not upon the general question but upon the subject of the destruction of the School Boards in those particular towns".[134] Perks was also keen to coordinate the campaign and suggested to Rosebery that he write a note asking Lloyd George his opinion on some points raised in the Bill adding, "I know Lloyd George is anxious to be friendly".[135] The difficulty

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[133] Wemyss Reid to Rosebery, 23rd October 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10058, ff.57-8.

[134] Wemyss Reid to Rosebery, 20th November 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10058, ff.81-3.

[135] Perks to Rosebery, 29th November 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.39.

remained that the activists who opposed the Education Bill had committed themselves to a rigorous campaign on a sectarian level. Lloyd George had warned Nicoll earlier in the month:

> It is now too late to reverse the policy of "no rate". The leaders of the Free Churches have committed themselves too deeply for reconsideration & they must go through with their threats otherwise they will make Nonconformity contemptible in the eyes of the nation. However, I have no doubt as to their organising first. The Bill is as obnoxious to day as it ever was.[136]

Nicoll had stated emphatically in the November Contemporary Review that Nonconformists must oppose the Bill, "by every endeavour...one of the great forms of resistance being the refusal of the school rate".[137] However the British Weekly editor also suggested that the English Free Churches would be prepared to accept the Scottish educational system, "All they wish is to have public control, and they are not afraid of the results".[138] Rosebery responded publicly urging the Government to

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[136] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 4th November 1902, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., in Munson, Nonconformists, p.261.

[137] W.R.Nicoll, "The Education Bill and the Free Churches," Contemporary Review, November 1902, p.632.

[138] W.R.Nicoll, Contemporary Review, November 1902, pp.642-3. Nicoll believed that at least the Scottish system would (1) secure the administration of education by popular bodies, elected for that end; (2) abolish all sectarian tests for teachers; (3) establish undenominational religious teaching over the whole country; (4) secure full and adequate protection of minorities everywhere. Stoddart, William Robertson Nicoll, p.157.

examine Nicoll's suggestion.[139] During a speech on 8th December he became further involved in the campaign with his assertion that if the Nonconformists of England submitted tamely to the Education Bill, "I will not say that they will be weakened religiously, but I will say that in my judgement, politically they will have ceased to exist". Rosebery went further in the Scottish Liberal Club, arguing that if the country accepted the Bill without protest, Liberalism would be dead.[140] Wemyss Reid noted that the battle over education could be used to energise the party. He wrote to Rosebery of the dullness in the political world after a long Parliamentary session, "but out of doors & in the country there is more than enough of spirit & if the Noncons. take your admonitions to heart we should have a lively winter".[141]

The Bill received its Royal assent on the 18th December and the King congratulated Balfour on "the skill, temper and patience," which he had shown, "in steering such a difficult and controversial Bill through the House".[142] Nicoll told Perks, "It is a good policy for the clergy to grumble that they have not got more, but in reality they are delighted as they well may be". He felt sure that if Nonconformists tried to work the Bill they would be lost and urged Perks to lead the Liberal Methodists, "They are

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[139] Stoddart, William Robertson Nicoll, p.157.

[140] Stoddart, William Robertson Nicoll, p.158.

[141] Wemyss Reid to Rosebery, 14th December 1902, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10058, ff.92-3.

[142] Lord Knollys to Balfour, 5th December 1902, Balfour MSS. Add. MS.49683, f.114, in Munson, "Unionist Coalition," p.641.

all right if they have a man of wisdom and standing to lead them, but otherwise they will not be able to stand up against the official ring".[143]

vi. Passive Resistance:

The first prosecution for nonpayment of rates took place in May 1903.[144] Perks wrote to Rosebery, "There is every indication that the revolt of the Nonconformists against the Education Act will be extremely serious - far beyond anything that the Government or the Liberal Press supposed. I was perfectly right in my forecast".[145] But the tone of the more general Nonconformist response was more dutiful than outraged. Wemyss Reid described the Free Church protestors as reluctant demonstrators:

> Yesterday's Nonconformist demonstration was the largest I have ever seen...How touching to see how widely the procession of yesterday differed from the stuff of which ordinary demonstrations are composed. I think a good half of the people (respectable women, grey haired men in tall hats and good black coats & even smart people in fair horse (?) with coachmen and footmen on the box) did not like being there. But they had come at the call of duty & were very grave & very resolute. It was such a turn = out of the middle

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[143] Nicoll to Perks, 2nd January 1903, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.54.

[144] Machin, op.cit., p.266.

[145] Perks to Rosebery, 16th May 1903, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, ff.82-83.

classes as I never saw before.[146]

By June 1903 there were 206 Passive Resistance Leagues; a number which was eventually swollen to 648.[147] Alongside the British Weekly which published regular updates on passive resisters, the movement received constant support from the Light of Home and the Crusader - which was started for this purpose and became a weekly instead of a monthly in October 1903. Both were edited by J.Edward Sears.[148] It was most common for resisters to return their payment for rates having deducted the amount calculated by the Leagues as being used to subsidize denominational education. Those who appeared before the magistrate and continued to refuse payment then had some goods seized in lieu of money. Often the same item was taken each time a rate demand was issued as it was common for friends of the Resister to purchase his goods at auction, returning them to the owner.[149] As Nicoll lived in London and was exempt from paying the rate (as the Education Act did not extend to the capital) he proposed taking a house in the country.[150]

The farcical nature of nonpayment of rates meant that it was difficult for resisters to maintain credibility.

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[146] Wemyss Reid to Rosebery, 24th May 1903, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10058, ff.118-119.

[147] Munson, Nonconformists, p.264.

[148] Munson, Nonconformists, pp.264-5. The deaths of Hughes and Parker in 1902 meant that Sears became one of the most important members in the movement alongside Nicoll and Clifford.

[149] Munson, Nonconformists, p.274.

[150] Lawrence, "William Robertson Nicoll", p.180.

But for its leaders the campaign of passive resistance was of much broader significance than playing cat and mouse with teapots and candlesticks. As pragmatic men they had to recognise the difficulties which faced them politically. The Liberal party was their most obvious vehicle yet it was ever cautious of alienating the Irish vote and was reluctant to advocate wholesale undenominational education. Perks reminded Rosebery in April 1903 that critics did not realize that the Education Act would not be reversed with Irish help. He believed that the Liberal party needed to draw to its side the multitudes who left over Home Rule.[151] However Perks and his ilk were also faced with the fact that Nonconformist demands also stood in the way of a reconciliation with many Liberal Unionists.

It was not simply Liberal Unionists who were alienated by the stringent nature of Nonconformist action. In December 1903 R.B.Haldane threatened to retire from politics and leave the Liberal party if the Nonconformist call for the total repeal of the Education Act was not dropped. However Haldane did favour considerable amendment and proposed a Bill which encompassed two main principles; universal public schools with effective public control, and abolition of all sectarian tests. Perks, who did not want to see the fragmentation of the Liberal League any more than a split in the Liberal party, nonetheless believed that the solution lay in a measure which provided for the purchase or renting of Anglican schools by public

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[151] Perks to Rosebery, 4th April 1903, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS. 10051, f.73.

authorities and permitted parents who desired additional religious instruction for their children to have ministers of religion in school during school hours.[152] Perks wrote to Rosebery that he was beginning to feel very strongly that Nonconformists would have to try and come into line on education with their Free Food allies. However a meeting with the Free Church leaders revealed that they were not ready to compromise, opposing the idea of the clergy in schools during school hours. Perks met with Lloyd George on 23rd December and discovered that his fellow Nonconformist took the same line as the Free Church leaders.[153] On the same day Perks informed Asquith, "It is the bounden duty of the Nonconformists, thru every agency in their power, to oppose every candidate be he Unionist Free Trader or anything else who will not accept our Education policy".[154]

Illegality was also problematic for the Free Church Council. In October 1903 G.S.Hirst, Chief of Staff at the Memorial Hall published a pamphlet entitled, "Organising for the Elections: a manual for the secretaries of the Free Church Councils and others engaged in organising the Free Churches in connection with the forthcoming elections". Under the heading "What Free Churchmen Want" were two

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[152] Perks to Rosebery, 12th December 1903, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, ff.162-3.

[153] Perks to Rosebery, 19th December 1903, 21st December 1903, 23rd December 1903, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.168, f.171, ff.173-4.

[154] Perks to Asquith, 23rd December 1903, Asquith Papers, Bodleian Library, X, f.118, in Koss, "1906: Revival and Revivalism," from A.J.A.Morris, Edwardian Radicalism 1900-14: some aspects of British radicalism, London, 1974, p.85.

points of consensus; that the vital amendment of the Education Act was of primary importance both to the Free Churches and to the English nation, and education must be made the most imperative question in the next municipal and general elections. The Manual stressed the importance of getting candidates to make firm promises on the education question and not accepting the reply that the matter would be given "very careful consideration". In an introduction to the pamphlet Thomas Law noted that it dealt with work which usually lay outside the duties of the Free Church Council. Under normal circumstances both local and national politics were to be kept out of an organisation whose primary aim was the spiritual and moral uplifting of the people but, Law argued, the Government had forced on the nation two Acts which did grievous wrong to Free Churchmen.[155] Despite Law's contention the National Free Church Council did not want to cause division among its members and left the organisation of the campaign against the Education Act to the Passive Resistance Committee organised by Clifford.[156]

Nicoll found the business of controlling the movement which he had helped to start extremely difficult. He was keen for Rosebery to take a more active role in the Liberal League and to deliver a speech on the Church crisis as the former Liberal leader seemed to be more sympathetic to the Nonconformist cause than Asquith or Haldane. However Rosebery was not inclined to jump into the fray without

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[155] Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., A/2/3/9.

[156] Machin, op.cit, p.266.

hearing, as Perks put it, the imperative and resistless call of the country.[157] Nicoll's relations with Lloyd George were also strained by the early refusal of 14 of the 16 Welsh Local Authorities to enforce the Education Act. This had left English passive resisters isolated as Scotland had not been affected by Balfour's proposals.[158] Evan Davies wrote to Lloyd George from the Carnarvon Education Offices warning that a settlement for Wales might be achieved without much difficulty but Lloyd George must consider his duty to English Nonconformity.[159] Lloyd George wrote to Nicoll asking for his support:

> ...it would strengthen [the Welsh County Councils] considerably if they knew that the leaders of English Nonconformity would be prepared to back them up when the blow is delivered, and I should very much like to be able to inform them when I go down next week that such support is forthcoming. We cannot do without your powerful influence and although I have no doubt that all of it will be on our side when trouble comes still I should like to hear from you with a word to that effect. I know it will have great weight with the Welsh Nonconformists.[160]

The Welsh revolt meant the closure of all state aided schools as the County Councils would issue no rate. Lloyd George proposed opening the chapels for the education of children until the dispute had passed. He wrote to Nicoll

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[157] Perks to Rosebery, 22nd June 1904, Nicoll to Perks, 2nd September 1904, Perks to Rosebery, 8th July 1904, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.231, f.260, ff.235-6.

[158] Munson, Nonconformists, p.277.

[159] Evan Davies to Lloyd George, 17th March 1904, Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., A/1/3/1.

[160] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 20th February 1904, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, f.22.

requesting his "powerful aid" in carrying through the policy. It was hoped that the Free Church Council would assist Welsh Nonconformists not only by sending speakers but also funds for the *ad hoc* schools. Lloyd George asked Nicoll to address a meeting in Cardiff to be attended by the leaders of the Free Churches. Nicoll was to share the platform with Clifford and Perks.[161] The meeting, which took place the following month, resolved that if the Default Act was enforced Nonconformist parents should withdraw their children from Church Schools. The Act empowered the Board of Education to support denominational schools without the approval of the local authority.[162]

vii. Education under the Liberals:

The campaign of passive resistance found it difficult to maintain support over a period of years. "The real loss came in 1906 after January's landslide Liberal victory", Munson has written, "this would, of course, support the view that resisters' motives were essentially political for the political make up of the Government should make no difference to the alleged injustices which the Act produced".[163] But Resisters made no secret of the fact that their aim was to have the Education Act repealed. The

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[161] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 15th September 1904, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, f.24.

[162] Machin, op.cit, pp.268-269.

[163] Munson, Nonconformists, p.272.

campaign of civil disobedience had been an attempt to undermine the Act as well as a registering of discontent and therefore had a political motive. The Liberals had promised that they would do their best to appease Nonconformists and the Government had a large number of Free Churchmen in its ranks. Therefore it was more difficult for the leaders of the resistance movement to hold the support of the general public. Lloyd George and Perks may have been more disposed to compromise once their party formed the Government but Nonconformist leaders were not so easily satisfied.

Political life, tasted by Nonconformists during the campaign of passive resistance, no doubt encouraged greater participation in the General Election campaign of 1906. The desire to see the Education Act repealed and its authors turned out of office also drove the Free Churches to an active role in the electioneering process. Campbell-Bannerman was quoted in the Times as saying, "We have been put into office by the Nonconformists,"[164] and 24 of the new M.P.s were passive resisters.[165] Consequently the party decided to deal with education in its first major Bill. Augustine Birrell, as President of the Board of Education, had the task of drawing up the legislation. The Bill met some of the Nonconformists' grievances. It forced denominational schools to have nondenominational teaching three days a week with sectarian variations on the two remaining days and stated that the majority of school

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[164] Koss, "Revival and Revivalism," p.93.

[165] Munson, Nonconformists, p.282.

managers should be from outside the denomination.[166] Certain schools could apply for "extended facilities" which would enable them to have denominational teaching every day of the week. This was outlined in Clause 4. Birrell argued that the Clause - which many Free Church leaders did not like - was the consequence of their opposition to secular education.[167]

Robert Perks judged the Bill unfavourably and wrote to Rosebery calling it a compromise which pleased no one. He claimed that Nonconformists did not like it because of the provisions inserted to appease Catholics and Anglicans; the absence of any attempt to nationalise teacher training colleges and the absence of any provision for small education training areas. The Free Church Federation had given the Bill its "qualified blessing"[168] and Clifford moved in the Baptist Assembly that although the Bill should be welcomed it ought to be significantly amended.[169] The British Weekly remarked that its hopes in Birrell had been largely fulfilled and its fears dissipated. Of the two main Nonconformist grievances, single school areas had been addressed but not the lack of opportunity for Nonconformist teachers.[170]

Birrell met with the Nonconformist Parliamentary

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[166] Munson, Nonconformists, p.284.

[167] M.Cruickshank, Church and State in English Education 1870 to the Present Day, London 1963, p.93, p.95.

[168] Perks to Rosebery, 10th April 1906, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, ff.146-8.

[169] Machin, op.cit, p.286.

[170] British Weekly, 12th April 1906.

Committee in an attempt to convince them that Clause 4, which gave rate aid to denominational schools, should not be struck out. He said that although he did not like the Clause he did not consider it an intrinsic part of the Bill but believed that it was necessary in order to appease the Catholics. Birrell contended that if the Liberal party had to go to the country over the Bill it would come back with greatly reduced numbers.[171] Perks likened the situation to that of 1870 when Gladstone carried the Bill with the help of the Tories and was defeated in 1874.[172] He believed that Chamberlain and Balfour hoped to drive a wedge through the Government majority by concentrating on Clause 4.[173] However the Government could not risk a General Election. James Denney wrote to Nicoll:

> Have you any feeling that people are getting tired of the Education Bill, and that the Government will suffer neither for the goodness nor the badness but for the abhorred presence of the thing?" The only thing the "silent voter" wants is to hear no more about it, and if it were possible that it should lead to an election in the spring, I fear it would be all up with the Liberal Government.[174]

Chamberlain had prompted Balfour and Anglican supporters to accept modification of the 1902 Act into a

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[171] Perks to Rosebery, 14th May 1906, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, f.165.

[172] Perks to Rosebery, 8th May 1906, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, f.160.

[173] Perks to Rosebery, 21st May 1906, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, f.170.

[174] Denney to Nicoll, 6th June 1906, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.67.

form of secular rate-aided education, with religious teaching undertaken by private arrangements after school hours.[175] This was in tune with the secular option Nicoll had indicated he could accept. In July Denney wrote, "What a jingle the Education Bill is becoming. If the House of Lords mangle it past recognition, do you suppose the present House of Commons would venture on the logical alternative supported by you and Chamberlain?"[176] However Nicoll was not in the majority. In November Perks wrote to Rosebery urging him to speak in the Lords against Clause 4. He noted that hardly any Nonconformists were in favour of secular teaching but preferred Cowper Temple teaching under which the teacher could explain the Bible.[177]

The battle was essentially futile as the fate of the Bill lay in the hands of the Lords who passed an amendment unacceptable to Nonconformists. The British Weekly described the Bill substituted by the Lords as "a great deal worse than the Bill of 1902".[178] Campbell-Bannerman and Lloyd George argued strongly in Cabinet for rejection *en bloc*. The Prime Minister reminded the Cabinet of the lessons of the 1870 Education Act and the Bill was

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[175] Jay, Joseph Chamberlain, p.30.

[176] Denney to Nicoll, 2nd July 1906, Letters from Denney to Nicoll, p.72.

[177] Perks to Rosebery, 8th November 1906, Alienation of Nonconformists was exacerbated because of attempts by Whips to break the Free Church Parliamentary group. Perks to Rosebery, 20th December 1906, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, f.213, f.245.

[178] British Weekly, 13th December 1906.

temporarily abandoned.[179] "The net result," Perks wrote to Rosebery, "is that the Chief Bill of the Session is lost; the Noncons. alienated: the Catholics won over: and (I think) the Lords strengthened".[180]

The following year McKenna introduced a one clause Bill which removed from the authority of the managers the responsibility for funding denominational religious instruction through the rates. The British Weekly urged Nonconformists to support the Bill as, although a limited measure which did not touch on the real grievance, "so far as it goes it is in the right direction". It appeared to the British Weekly that Nonconformists had little to lose from having the Bill introduced: "The House of Lords will probably throw it out, and then we shall have a great reinforcement and revival of passive resistance".[181]

The Liberals attempted to keep Nicoll onside. Shortly before he introduced his 1908 Bill Runciman wrote protesting against Nonconformist criticisms at the delay in settling the education question. The Minister for Education assured Nicoll that he was negotiating for a settlement and hoped to reach a successful conclusion. On seeing the letter George Riddell thought it "a very weak one for a Cabinet Minister to write to a newspaper editor

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[179] Perks to Rosebery, 12th December 1906, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, ff.236-238.

[180] Perks to Rosebery, 12th December 1906, 20th December 1906, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, ff.236-7, ff.245-9.

[181] British Weekly, 28th February 1907.

who had criticised him..."[182] The following day Nicoll showed Riddell a letter he had received from Birrell regarding the Education Bill. Riddell recorded: "He [Birrell] asked Nicoll to dine with him...to meet Runciman. Evidently the object of the letter was to appease Nicoll and gain his support...A curious thing for a Cabinet Minister to write such a letter".[183]

At the beginning of November Runciman was still wary of Nonconformist opposition and had a successful meeting with Free Church M.P.s during which they approved his proposed Bill.[184] Two days later Nicoll lunched with Runciman who subsequently received support in the British Weekly for his cooperation with Nonconformist M.P.s and the indication that he would not continue in the face of Free Church opposition.[185] Runciman introduced his Bill to the Commons on 20th November. It conceded 3 points to Nonconformists: public control in all rate-aided elementary schools; no religious tests in the appointment of teachers; no denominational teaching in any of those schools at the cost of the rates.[186] The British Weekly rejoiced that there was a consensus for conciliation among moderates in

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[182] 28th October 1908, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62969, f.14.

[183] 29th October 1908, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62969, f.18.

[184] Machin, op.cit, p.291.

[185] 11th November 1908, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62969, f.40, British Weekly, 12th November 1908.

[186] British Weekly, 26th November 1908.

the Church of England and the Free Churches.[187] Clifford also gave support to the Bill once he had established that it was consistent with his position. A British Weekly journalist went to interview him and found him "busily engaged in looking through a book of newspaper cuttings to see if he had said anything that would prevent him supporting the suggested settlement".[188]

The Lords again represented an obstacle and the Liberals' weakening position in by-elections encouraged the Government to shelve the Bill.[189] Runciman wrote to Nicoll at 12 o'clock the night before the Bill was withdrawn saying he still had hope but informed the editor the following day that the Bill was dead. Riddell observed that it was "Curious how a Cabinet Minister could find time during such a crisis to write such communications. They are evidently much afraid of Nicoll".[190]

The courting of Nicoll was effective. The British Weekly gave a sympathetic hearing to the withdrawal of the Education Bill and harried Nonconformists for the impossibility of their demands, (seeking Biblical teaching with an opt-out concession which they then fought when Birrell and McKenna attempted to draft a Bill). However the basis of the British Weekly position was consistent with Nicoll's line throughout the education debate:

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[187] British Weekly, 26th November 1908.

[188] 11th November 1908, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62969, f.41.

[189] Machin, op.cit., p.292.

[190] 11th December 1908, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62969, f.52.

> if there is to be religion in the schools there must be religious equality...that in a measure providing a true equality the right of entry and the right of contracting out in some form or other...must be granted, and not granted as a compromise, but as a matter of common justice.[191]

Two general elections in 1910 eliminated the Liberal majority and left the government dependent on the Irish Nationalists. This made a solution to the education question appear less likely because the Irish were advocates of sectarian education. With this in mind Nicoll dissuaded the Master of Elibank from shaping a new Education Bill in 1911, arguing that the Government should concentrate on a Disestablishment Bill. Nicoll opined that if "a new Education Bill was brought in at the present time it would look as if the Government were singling out a class for vindictive treatment".[192]

The question would not go down and Nicoll, as ever, could not be relied upon to follow automatically the line of the Government or the majority of the Free Churches. In November 1913 he attended "a very influential meeting...[at which] those present were very bitter against the Government".[193] Pease, now the Education Minister, had proposed to deal with single-school areas by conveying

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[191] British Weekly, 10th December 1908.

[192] November 1911, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62969, ff.113-114.

[193] 12th November 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62973, f.72. Riddell told Lloyd George that Nicoll described it as "the most determined and violent meeting of the Free Church leaders at which he had ever been present."Riddell to Lloyd George, n.d., Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., C/7/4/3.

Dissenting children to the nearest County Council schools in omnibuses. Nicoll compared the plan to "conveying little lepers in tumbrils". He warned Riddell that a Committee had been appointed to draw up a manifesto "which would be very damaging to the Government".[194] Riddell wrote to Lloyd George, "He [Nicoll] has written to Pease who has replied asking Nicoll to go to see him which he will not do as he never goes to visit Cabinet Ministers!!"[195] Nicoll claimed he had only written to Pease "as an act of friendship to the Government who, he said, had treated the Dissenters very badly".[196]

Riddell also informed Percy Illingworth, who "seemed much concerned" over what had taken place and arranged for himself, Lloyd George, Pease, Riddell and Nicoll to dine the following week. But Nicoll declined the offer, not wanting to meet Pease.[197] Lloyd George supported the Nonconformist position and believed that "the time [was] ripe for a judicious article in the "British Weekly" in an effort to formulate a scheme".[198]

To this end Lloyd George and Riddell dined at Nicoll's house the following evening. Lloyd George attempted to

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[194] 12th November 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62973, f.73.

[195] Riddell to Lloyd George, n.d., Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., C/7/4/3.

[196] 12th November 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62973, f.73.

[197] 13th November 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62973, f.74.

[198] 15th November 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62973, f.75.

cajole Nicoll into writing the sort of article "which while stating the Dissenters' point of view would not be unfriendly to the Government". Nicoll did not intend to write an article but agreed to write privately to Asquith "telling him of the necessity for prompt and definite action". Lloyd George assured Nicoll that Pease "was a stupid man and that he had no authority to pledge the Government to the proposals which had excited so much wrath".[199]

Nonconformist pressure brought from the Prime Minister the assurance that he had "determined to abandon any attempt at compromise in regard to the single school areas and that he [would] go straight ahead and endeavour to carry out the Dissenters' policy". Haldane and Pease had been "beaten to a frazzle in the Cabinet".[200]

Nicoll remained the minder of educational reform throughout the period leading to the First World War. Despite the change in emphasis once the Liberals had taken power in 1906 the British Weekly continued to record the fate of those appearing before Magistrates and being jailed for nonpayment of rates.[201] The outbreak of the War dealt a blow to the Free Church involvement in education. Most, like Nicoll, let their preoccupation wane somewhat in handing over loyalty to the Government. When Fisher

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[199] 16th November 1911, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62973, ff.82-84.

[200] 14th December 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62973, f.97.

[201] eg. British Weekly, 24th September 1903, 14th March 1912, 11th September 1913, 16th March 1916.

introduced an abortive Education Bill in 1917 the British Weekly discussed it without reference to the repercussions for the Free Churches.[202] But the Government was keen to avoid a renewal of sectarian controversy and Fisher's 1918 Act was concerned with raising the school leaving age, expanding secondary schools and establishing new central schools and day continuation schools. The Education (Scotland) Act of the same year also provoked little controversy as the Scottish system was unusual in having only 10% of children educated in Voluntary schools.[203] When Fisher did believe that a re-examination of religious education was unavoidable in 1920 he immediately encountered the hostility of the Education Committee of the N.C.E.F.C.[204] Nicoll warned that it would be a blunder to try to deal with education. Fisher's proposal to abolish the Cowper-Temple clause brought the caution that the Free Churches would "not on any account surrender what [they had] secured with such difficulty.[205] The old Free Church guard was ever awake. In 1921 Clifford wrote to Nicoll warning, "We must be ready to rally our forces for fresh attempts will be made on the rates for sectarianism".[206]

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[202] British Weekly, 16th August 1917, 25th October 1917.

[203] Cruickshank, Church and State, pp.114-5, p.117.

[204] Cruickshank, Church and State, p.118.

[205] British Weekly, 1st April 1920.

[206] Clifford to Nicoll, 3rd March 1921, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

viii. Conclusion:

Even in education Nicoll was a loose cannon in Liberal and Nonconformist circles. He maintained a degree of intellectual integrity, regarding each education bill on its own merits, while nurturing an instinctive desire to rejuvenate Nonconformity. Throughout the debate the British Weekly campaigned for equal right of entry in schools, although this placed it at odds with Clifford and Hughes in 1896. Nicoll could work alongside Free Church leaders in 1901 and 1902 because the bills in these years did nothing to redress the educational influence of Anglicans. He claimed that the Nonconformist conscience was being invaded by the proposal of the Church of England to be treated as Roman Catholic schools claimed to be treated, where a distinct spiritual aura would pervade the school and "the children become imbued with Catholicity".[207] As the Bills appeared to give State aid to religious schools without public control, basic anti-Catholicism could be combined with a "no taxation without representation" lament.

The affront to Dissent also represented an opportunity to revive the Free Church tradition. Nicoll believed that passive resistance would "create a renaissance of Nonconformity...that one of the resultant effects must prove the uprising of a new race of Nonconformists tested by sacrifice, with convictions firm and purpose

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[207] W.R.Nicoll, Contemporary Review, p.632.

undaunted..."[208] A Free Church revival was seductive to Nicoll and allowed him to sidestep the challenge that as an expression of conscience, passive resistance was compromised by being so well organised. Once Nonconformists had declared their opposition in 1902 and the Bill was passed into legislation, the campaign gathered its own momentum. It was spurred on by the derision of those outwith Nonconformity and by the strong language of those within. In the Spring of 1903 Nicoll reminded a meeting of the National Free Church Council of Fairbairn's promise to Balfour that Nonconformists would never submit. Nicoll elaborated that these words should never have been used "unless used in the full integrity of their meaning".[209]

Dissent received much of its energy from its sense of alienation. Paradoxically the success of the Free Church struggle to secure a say in British national life had taken the edge off the Nonconformist identity. In looking for respect Dissenters had become eminently respectable. Wemyss Reid's description of the Nonconformist demonstration in May 1903 presented people who were reluctant, "very grave and very resolute" in answering the call of duty. The passive resistance movement showed Free Churchmen not so much manipulated by men like Nicoll and Sears as people at a crossroads trying to find a meaningful way to express their religion, and falling back on the tradition of public suffering for conscience's sake.

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[208] Bateman, John Clifford, p.274.

[209] Stoddart, William Robertson Nicoll, p.159.

Passive resistance was part of the broader campaign for religious equality and was therefore political in intent. Association with the Liberal party was necessary for practical political purposes. Catholics had an influential Irish lobby and Denney had recognised the advantage of Anglicans in having the Unionists as keeper of their educational interests. But political intrigue tainted a conscience movement. After the collapse of the 1908 Education Bill the British Weekly urged its readers to carry on the cause of passive resistance and reminded them of the great work the movement had done in bringing the Liberals to power. It bemoaned the absence of passive resisters' agitation in by-elections but stressed that the by-product of this type of political activity was the rallying of Nonconformists and inducing many who were otherwise indifferent to investigate the education question.[210] This lateral effect of political involvement was at the forefront of the political Nonconformist's purpose.

Nicoll saw the Free Church relationship with the Liberal party as one of mutual benefit. M.P.s like Runciman, Birrell, Lloyd George and Perks attempted to appeal to Nicoll's vanity in order to compromise his position. Although Nicoll was noted by contemporaries for his vanity he was not a political *ingenue*. His anger with Lloyd George during the Welsh revolt of 1903 showed that his support could not be taken for granted as did the Liberal Government's attempts to keep him informed of their

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[210] British Weekly, 10th December 1908.

educational proposals.

Only in 1911 did Nicoll truly compromise himself in dissuading the Master of Elibank from drawing up a new Education Bill. Despite the calculation that any such move might jeopardise the cause of disestablishment (and the fact that the Liberals had been trying for five years to settle the education question), Nicoll was aware that prosecutions were still taking place for nonpayment of rates. This represented a breach of faith as well as a breach of conscience.

Lloyd George was said to have admitted frankly that the "real objective" in the Welsh revolt was Disestablishment.[211] Nicoll was similarly motivated. The Free Churches again attempted to use parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means to secure their interests. Yet despite their efforts to get the Liberals into power in 1906 their expectations were largely disappointed.

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[211] Morant to Balfour, 17th September 1904, Balfour MS. Add 49787, ff.97-102, in Munson, Nonconformists, p.277.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRACTICAL LIBERALISM

The controversy over the 1902 Education Act served to underline for Joseph Chamberlain the limited ways in which revenue could be raised.[1] His advocacy of preferential tariffs in 1903 rooted the politics of the Edwardian period in a debate over economics. The British Weekly was a free trade newspaper which supported low spending government, but at the beginning of this period it was still pressing primarily religious issues with little appetite for the intricacies of social reform. The Liberal election victory in 1906 altered the position of the British Weekly, theoretically giving it access to more power; it had to reconcile the need to exploit this without compromising its independence. This chapter charts the British Weekly's development from a religious pressure paper to becoming one of the central newspapers in Lloyd George's political weaponry.

The House of Lords' determination to thwart legislation on education, temperance reform and Welsh Disestablishment pushed the British Weekly into a battle to dismantle the Second Chamber. Lloyd George encouraged Nicoll to see a fight with the Lords as an extension of the campaign for disestablishment. He had resolutely wooed Nicoll after critical articles appeared in the British Weekly in 1907. Nicoll became a Free Church lobbyist within Lloyd George's inner circle and in return he provided the M.P. with access to his anxious middle class Nonconformist readership whose concerns Nicoll understood and expressed. This was particularly exploited during the

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[1] Sykes, Tariff Reform, p.29.

controversy over the People's Budget when the British Weekly was part of the campaign to make Radical Liberalism friendly to middle-income earners. Nicoll's involvement in the 1909 Budget campaign was pivotal in redetermining his political motivation into a more secular form.

i. Prelude to 1906:

In May 1902 Joseph Chamberlain spoke the language of a nation and Empire under threat and voiced the concern that it was not simply Britain's naval supremacy which was in danger but also her economic strength. He attempted to impress upon his Birmingham audience the fact that "old and antiquated" methods of fiscal policy had no place in the new century. "At the present moment the Empire is being attacked on all sides and in our present isolation we must look to ourselves". Chamberlain implored a cheering crowd, "...if we do not take every chance in our power to keep British trade in British hands, I am certain that we shall deserve the disasters which will infallibly come upon us".[2] The following year Chamberlain made a more definitive statement on preferential tariffs, deriding the system of "free trade" which did not let Britain differentiate between those who treated her well and those who treated her badly.[3] The Times declared that friends of England everywhere would hail the speech with

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[2] Times, 17th May 1902.

[3] Times, 16th May 1903.

"thankfulness for a man great enough to express Imperial aspirations and to formulate an Imperial policy".[4] The British Weekly saw a fiscal revolution which would bring about the speedy and complete downfall of British power and warned of the consequences of retaliatory action by the United States. It saw in Chamberlain's developing theory the desire to displace the centre of the Empire by concentrating manufacturing in more geographically appropriate places such as Canada.

In agreement with the Liberal party view put forward by Edward Grey, the British Weekly believed that Chamberlain's scheme would result in the destruction of both the United Kingdom and the British Empire;[5] and was certain that the working men of Britain would not consent "to be starved and pinched till they die in order that their grandchildren may have the advantage of trafficking with forty millions of British colonial subjects..."[6] Although later in the year Harold Harmsworth suggested to Perks that Chamberlain may try to bid for the Nonconformist vote by repealing the Education Act, "if not more", the British Weekly damned Chamberlain as having one strong principle: that he should govern England. "Mr. Chamberlain loves his country", it warned "though he loves power more".[7]

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[4] Times, 18th May 1903.

[5] British Weekly, 4th June 1903.

[6] British Weekly, 21st May 1903.

[7] Perks to Rosebery, 8th October 1903, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.138, British Weekly, 4th June 1903.

Tariff reform allowed the Liberal party to unite behind a traditional cause which was free from the sectarianism of the education campaign. The fact that Home Rule no longer played such a prominent part in the Liberal programme also encouraged former Whigs to reconsider their political position - although the perceived influence of Nonconformists was prohibitive to rejoining the Liberals. This shift in political emphasis threatened Free Church power.[8] The British Weekly perceived the danger to the education campaign of an alternative rallying cry and cautioned the Liberal front bench that although Free Trade was one of the most important issues which could be put to the nation it did not rank alongside that of religious freedom. It reminded passive resisters that, "Just as life is more than meat, so does the one transcend the other",[9] underlying again the extent to which the British Weekly remained a journal for religious lobbying. Nicoll relied on his readers' understanding that even though tariff reform was presented as a direct threat to the United Kingdom and the Empire the specific task of the Free Churches was to protect their own freedom. The tradition of Dissent helped them to imbibe this paradox.

Politically Nicoll maintained his Rosberyite stance. He had told Perks in July 1904 that although he was sometimes disappointed that Rosebery spoke as a political

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[8] B.B.Gilbert, David Lloyd George: a political life 1863-1912, London 1987, pp.241-2.

[9] British Weekly, 4th June 1903, 24th September 1903.

advisor rather than a destined leader, he was prepared to wait patiently and would loyally support Rosebery whenever possible because he felt that Rosebery would "be called to guide the nation and...when the call" comes Rosebery would not "be found wanting". Nicoll was reported to have said that Campbell-Bannerman was an impossible leader, "men laugh at the bare idea".[10] Nevertheless Nicoll continued to show no preoccupation with the social reform debate prior to 1909. Those speeches of Campbell-Bannerman (at Edinburgh and Limehouse) which promised to respond to demands for a statement of policy on issues such as the provision of school meals, the payment of M.P.s and election expenses, were of more interest to the British Weekly for what the Liberal leader had to say about the Church crisis and how effectively he opposed Chamberlain.[11]

In 1904 the House of Lords' decision against the United Free Church of Scotland further occupied Nicoll's energy to the exclusion of other Liberal policy. The Lords upheld the protestations of a minority of the Free Church in Scotland which objected to the Union and gave it possession of the whole Church property. The day the judgement was delivered Nicoll wrote the leader for the Daily Chronicle which he claimed inspired the line of the Westminster Gazette and the Daily Mail. He also wrote a long leader for the British Weekly which he told his wife

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[10] Perks to Rosebery, 8th July 1904, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, ff.235-6.

[11] British Weekly, 10th November 1904, 22nd December 1904.

was "the hardest work I have ever done...It is the best that ever I could do, and I hope may never have such a job again".[12] The following month Nicoll advised Perks of the "intense desire" in Scotland that Rosebery should deliver a speech on the Church crisis. He warned that although in England there was very little understanding of what the business meant, in Scotland there was no other subject.[13]

The controversy exposed certain tensions in Nicoll's relationship with the Liberal Leaguers. His correspondence underlined the political lessons Nicoll had gathered during the Education controversy. Perks had furnished him with some notes on the recently published list of the new Council of the Liberal League.[14] Nicoll replied that it was unwise to publish an article on the League at that time because of the feelings in Scotland regarding the "great and unprecedented Church crisis". He argued that nothing should be done to disquiet the unity of the Liberal party in Scotland as the business could give a great impulse to liberalism there if it was properly handled. Nicoll believed that people were coming round to the idea that Rosebery was the only possible leader of the party, "If he would take off his coat and work he could unite the party very easily". Raising the profile of the League would provoke potential supporters and as animosity against it

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[12] Nicoll to Catherine Robertson Nicoll, 4th August 1904, in Darlow, op.cit., pp.185-6.

[13] Nicoll to Perks, 2nd September 1904, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.260.

[14] Perks to Rosebery, 5th September 1904, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.259.

had died down there was no need to reassert its claims. Nicoll warned Perks that leaders in England were anxious not to make the Church crisis a party issue unless or until they were forced to do so.[15] The editor as always, was prepared to use injustice for longer term religious/political gain. If the Unionists could be demonised by their association with the Lords then the Liberal momentum could continue. For a campaigner like Nicoll injustice was bitter-sweet because it was anticipated that edifices could fall when confronted with growing moral righteousness.

Throughout 1905 Nicoll consolidated his association with Rosebery. In April he dined in Rosebery's company with "only about half a dozen [others] there". The former leader spoke frankly about an anticipated Liberal majority, Labour's hatred of John Burns and his great fear that Liberals would not stick together.[16] Although Nicoll claimed that he was "not much at home in political gatherings", he attended a Liberal League dinner on the 13th April which "was very successful", and where "Rosebery, who was in good spirits, made an excellent speech".[17]

The purpose of the League however, was increasingly unclear and in the Autumn Perks informed Rosebery that the

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[15] Nicoll to Perks, 2nd September 1904, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10051, f.260.

[16] Nicoll to T.W.Stoughton, 5th April 1905, in Darlow, op.cit., pp.187-188.

[17] Nicoll to T.W.Stoughton, 15th April 1905, in Darlow, op.cit., pp.188-9.

League funds would only last over the Election whereupon they would possibly "have to sink to the dimensions of the Eighty Club".[18] Rosebery remained politically unpredictable and after the Election victory of 1906 the Liberal League appeared as a possible ally for disaffected Unionist Free Traders like Hugh Cecil and Strachey in the British Constitutional Association.[19] For this reason as well as sincere regret the British Weekly confessed to "a bitter disappointment and chagrin, at the fact of Lord Rosebery's standing out" of Campbell-Bannerman's newly formed Cabinet in December 1905.[20]

ii. Representation of Class after 1906:

The British Weekly had its own agenda to press after the transfer of power at the end of 1905. It aimed to play its part in giving "information and instruction to the utmost of [its] power, fighting as ever under the old flag of Christian freedom and progress". And while assuring its readership that once the Cabinet had been named it would render futile attempts to scare electors with the spectre

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[18] Perks to Rosebery, 26th October 1905, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, f.92. Nevertheless Perks disagreed with Fowler that a reception to be held by Rosebery in December should not be confined to League members. Fowler did not want to antagonise other sections of the party and risk revival of the Irish question. Conversely Perks believed that the League should maintain its independence and keep its members united with a view to coming back to Westminster with perhaps 100 M.P.s and therefore being a force to be reckoned with. Perks to Rosebery, 9th November 1905, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10052, ff.106-7.

[19] Sykes, Tariff Reform, p.157.

[20] British Weekly, 14th December 1905.

of Home Rule, it wanted a plain declaration from the party. "The alliance of British Liberals with Irish partisans of priestly supremacy must be in its nature capricious and incidental," it continued, "and the first business...the new Government will have to take up - the business of Education - will in all probability disrupt what remains of it".[21] While the Unionists were happy to emphasise the Liberal-Irish connection, the British Weekly determined to foreground religious freedom along with protection and Chinese slavery.[22] It hailed the Liberal victory, declaring that "For the friends of freedom the dark hour of despondency is past, and it has been succeeded by a general feeling of hope for the future".[23]

The British Weekly remarked that "One of the greatest and most gratifying phenomena of the Election [had been] the revelation it [gave] of the mighty power of Labour. Or rather...the willingness of the working classes to use the power they [had] so long possessed".[24] Responding to the election of 29 Labour Representative Committee Members, the British Weekly took an orthodox Liberal position:

> "We are not afraid of socialism so long as Liberals mean business...we do not believe that the working class are socialist, or that they will ever be, so long as they have fair treatment and a fair chance. It is the business of

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[21] British Weekly, 7th December 1905.

[22] British Weekly, 4th January 1906, 11th January 1906.

[23] British Weekly, 18th January 1906.

[24] British Weekly, 18th January 1906.

Liberals to give them both.[25]

Of Trades Unions the British Weekly stated, "We should like to see them guided, enlightened, reconciled with the claims of the community at large, but to put them down is impossible".[26] At the beginning of March it judged the Labour parliamentary presence as a "force strong enough to prevent the Government lapsing into that Whiggery which is the abiding danger of Officialdom".[27] The British Weekly took the view that there were endless issues on which the Progressive forces within Parliament could agree and it was futile to fret about the "far off days in which the practical policies of Liberals and Labourists [would] be irreconcilable".[28]

Although there was a general policy of cooperation, the British Weekly was vague on specific legislation. It supported the Government's Workmen's Compensation Bill, which although not a definitive answer, provided relief to a greater number of people.[29] The Government's blunder over the Trades Disputes Bill - in which Campbell-Bannerman supported Labour demands - was criticised because it undermined the Liberals' credibility, rather than for

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[25] British Weekly, 1st February 1906.

[26] British Weekly, 18th January 1906.

[27] British Weekly, 1st March 1906.

[28] British Weekly, 11th October 1906.

[29] British Weekly, 29th March 1906.

reasons of particular principle.[30] Early in 1908 the British Weekly remained cautious of the concept of the "right to work" and while conceding its abstract justice, argued that unemployment should be solved gradually, by many means cooperating to the one end.[31] Later in the year the significance of the Osborne Judgement was not realized. The British Weekly did not see it as a "heavy blow," assured that if the Unions maintained their unity "the democracy of the country [would be] strong enough to secure what they ask for".[32]

The British Weekly remained a step away from understanding the Labour movement because of its ultimate faith in the power of Liberalism to mediate in industrial disputes. Although it frequently supported the cause of strikers it maintained the belief that negotiation and agreement were possible. Before the Railway strike in 1907 the British Weekly was confident that deliberation and arbitration would pre-empt action and suggested that there was a "growing desire for an early settlement, as the present suspense [was] affecting trade, and causing anxiety to investors".[33] Once the strike had been declared the British Weekly supported the idea that Campbell-Bannerman should call Parliament together and ask for powers to deal

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[30] British Weekly, 5th April 1906.

[31] British Weekly, 19th March 1908.

[32] British Weekly, 3rd December 1908.

[33] British Weekly, 19th September 1907, 26th September 1907.

with the dispute.[34] Essentially the British Weekly believed that it was "in the interest of every patriot to avert deadly battles between capital and labour. The battle may come, but it should not come till both parties understand better than they do the issues of such a fight".[35]

Nicoll represented the concerns of the middle classes. Fear of the democratic majority had encouraged an amount of soul-searching and the adoption of a sense of victimhood on their part. In 1906 George Sims' series of articles in the Tribune, "The Bitter Cry of the Middle Classes," struck a national chord.[36] The British Weekly described them as "forceful, unanswerable articles," and used the issues raised to attack the high spending of the recently defeated Progressives in the London Borough Councils. In a recurring theme, it called for a return to the old Liberal watchwords: Economy, Efficiency and Publicity; and the greatest of these was Economy. "In the judgement of all sound Liberals through the history of Liberalism economy has been a primary thing," the British Weekly recorded, and drew on Sims to reiterate the ruin which higher rates brought on the "brave men and women who only by incessant struggle have been able to keep their heads above water".[37]

When Masterman published The Condition of England

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[34] British Weekly, 7th November 1907.

[35] British Weekly, 14th November 1907.

[36] H.V.Emy, Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892-1914, Cambridge 1973, pp.172-3.

[37] British Weekly, 8th November 1906.

three years later, the British Weekly noted his "somewhat belated wisdom" that the Progressive Party had ended its career in the metropolis because it had forgotten the middle classes. It restated its old view:

> For ourselves, we believe that the Middle Classes are the most anxious of men. They are anxious because they can rarely obtain security for themselves and their children. It is the pecuniary future most of all that troubles them. They do not expect much...We do not see any clear prospect of much alleviation. What they have learned to dread most is change, and they are easily frightened into Conservatism.[38]

In 1911 the British Weekly received many letters on a leading article, "The Church and Labour". Again these responses revealed that the sense of grievance among the middle class remained vivid. "I maintain it is the lower middle class who have the greatest struggle to live," one correspondent wrote, "with the ever increasing burden of local rates and income tax, which very few working men pay, although plenty are liable. It is time someone should plead their cause".[39] Yet this was exactly the cause which the British Weekly aimed to plead. The common fear that if so much emphasis was placed on the plight of the worker it would drive the middle class into the arms of the Conservatives informed the British Weekly response to all economic changes.

Throughout the lives of the last Liberal Government the British Weekly was on hand to make radicalism safe for the middle classes. In 1907 Jane Stoddart interviewed Rev.

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[38] British Weekly, 3rd June 1909.

[39] British Weekly, 12th October 1911.

J. Ernest Rattenbury (Superintendent of the West London Mission) under the heading "Why do I call myself a Socialist?" Rattenbury had confirmed her view that despite the label, he was an advocate of gradual reform rather than revolution. He had explained, "The ideal is that all the sources of wealth and produce should be entirely committed into the hands of the community. But in practice we must content ourselves for the present with methods of amelioration".[40] Stoddart used this inherent conservatism of many British Radicals to urge Socialists of the future to work with Liberal and Labour representatives to strip away the terrifying spectre of revolution and "to unveil the kindly features of a radical and comprehensive Social Reform".[41] Again here was the desire to bring all progressive souls into the safe Liberal temple.

In January 1908 Stoddart began her series, "Socialism: An Impartial Inquiry". She set out the premise that all Christians were agreed that the present condition of society could not be perpetuated as there were many fundamental wrongs; that Christianity was not bound up with any social theory, but existed for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God; and that since there was no revelation as to the economic structure of society, it was by the path of patient inquiry that the hope of true advance lay. Stoddart added:

> The Christian attitude to this question is surely

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[40] British Weekly, 24th October 1907.

[41] J.T.Stoddart, The New Socialism: an impartial inquiry, London 1909, p.180.

> that if the socialistic reconstruction of society can be shown to be for the material, moral, and spiritual progress of the masses, then it ought to be welcomed. It is on this point that the real controversy lies.[42]

The articles were published in book form the following year. Although Stoddart was wary of the illiberal nature of Socialism - in particular the impossibility of a free press if the state became the universal publisher[43] - she presented the New Socialists as more friendly towards the family and religion (but in England Socialists like Blatchford and Quelch remained anti-Christian).[44] She exposed the English Christian Socialists as sober and gradual reformers, many of whom veiled "the objects of the average Liberal or Radical under the high-sounding phrases of Socialism".[45] In drawing a clear line between "reformers" and "revolutionaries" Stoddart concluded that:

> The day of Socialist victory, as Marx understood it, fades into an ever more distant future...Nor is there any sign that the working-men of the world are prepared to surrender patriotic interests and enter into a great cosmopolitan alliance for the overthrow of capitalistic rule and the establishment of the International Socialist State.
> The real service rendered by Marx is that indirectly and unconsciously he quickened the zeal for social reform.[46]

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[42] British Weekly, 16th January 1908.

[43] Stoddart, Socialism, p.152.

[44] Stoddart, Socialism, Chap.10, Chap.11.

[45] Stoddart, Socialism, p.135.

[46] Stoddart, Socialism, pp.179-80.

In 1908 the British Weekly spoke with more envy than bitterness of Socialists' dedication. In a leader which examined their "art of persuasion," it noted that Socialists took their message to the people, were about their business all the time, aimed at conversions, spoke with a burning passion and were proud of their creed which they also practised. "Surely Christians have much to learn" the British Weekly concluded, "from the untiring energy and absolute simplicity and purpose of many who are giving their lives to bring in the kingdom of Socialism".[47]

Nevertheless New Liberalism appeared to offer a reply to Socialists. In February 1908 Churchill drew attention to the plight of the unemployed who had gained nothing from Britain's international position. The British Weekly noted the parallels between Churchill's words and those of a great many Socialist continental writers. It declared that so long as Liberal leaders adopted this tone the party had nothing to fear from Socialism.[48] Less than three months later Churchill was defeated at Manchester in the by-election caused by his promotion to the Cabinet illustrating that Socialists were not the only or major threat to the New Liberals. The British Weekly used the defeat to underline the necessity of educating the public. It stressed that the Liberal party must keep to its course of protecting Free Trade and passing social reform but most importantly it must keep up Free Trade propaganda. As a

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[47] British Weekly, 16th January 1908.

[48] British Weekly, 13th February 1908.

newspaper the British Weekly was necessarily aware of the importance of broadcasting the Liberal programme. Tirelessly and repetitively the British Weekly presented its own agenda along with that of the Liberal party.

iii. Sectarian Concerns:

Free Church expectation of the new administration was understandably high. The Liberal victory brought with it an unprecedented number of Nonconformists - 157 - into the Commons.[49] The Standard pinpointed the primary and fundamental fact that "the Ministerial victory is beyond all question a victory for the Nonconformists". The Bishop of Newcastle and Mrs. Humphry Ward also opined that the Education Act had been a major cause of the Unionist defeat.[50] The religious issues which preoccupied the British Weekly after 1906 were an extension of earlier concerns. Education represented a constant thorn and there remained the concern that Christianity proceeded in an ever more material fashion. Dods confessed to Nicoll, "I do not envy those who have to fight the battle of Christianity in the twentieth century. Yes, perhaps I do, but it will be a stiff fight, and will require great concessions to be made".[51] In this year also Nicoll took an opportunity to

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[49] Shannon, Crisis of Imperialism, p.378.

[50] British Weekly, 1st February 1906.

[51] Dods to Nicoll, 30th March 1906, in M.Dods, Later Letters of Marcus Dods, D.D., 1895-1909, London 1911, pp.211-2.

acknowledge in the Expositor the broad acceptance of the critical view of the Old Testament.[52] He conceded the need to appraise the New Testament but argued that the obvious fallibility of English Literature criticism was also applicable to Biblical scholarship. He wrote, "Christians are also entitled to ask for more agreement between critics of the Gospel history than has yet been reached. In the face of the differences that divide the extreme critics, one may doubt whether the problem of the composition of the Gospel is soluble".[53] Nicoll explained to Hutton that he "had no sympathy with those who distil a residuum of meaning from the Bible and pretend that this is what was intended by the sacred writers".[54]

The Biblical debate was given another jolt in 1907 with the publication of R.J. Campbell's ideas on the "New Theology" which prompted a high profiled debate on the viability of the old religious orthodoxies. It also challenged conservative believers to defend the inactivity which came from an "other worldly" view of Christ. Nicoll's response to the controversy provides confirmation of how little his religious beliefs had been shaken.

At a Summer School held six months after the publication of Campbell's book, it was contended that the popularity of New Theology resulted from the fact that the "young cause [had] struck the imagination, [had] appealed

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[52] Darlow, pp.354-355.

[53] W.R.Nicoll, "The Church's One Foundation," (1901) in Darlow, pp.359-360. Darlow suggests that Nicoll never substantially departed from this viewpoint.

[54] Darlow, p.356.

to the sympathies...of many thousands of people whose religious needs were left unsatisfied by orthodoxy..."[55] It was a very practical response to religion. At the inaugural meeting of the Summer School, one speaker declared that the "two great principles of religion were social service and personal character".[56]

Campbell described the Old Theology as having taken "for granted that man was a loathsome creature, a mere worm,...and, even at the best, a monument to God's forbearance and grace".[57] A speaker on the Atonement argued that evolution proved there had been no Fall and no total depravity; and that the new ethical temper of the age had made the Atonement an unacceptable concept. "Our only wonder" he concluded, "is that such a doctrinal nightmare, so unsubstantial, yet so heavy, should have been allowed to rest upon human minds and hearts for so long".[58] In the second of two unsigned leaders on the New Theology at the time of the publication of Campbell's book, Denney in the British Weekly criticised the narrowness of the author's description of orthodox New Testament belief and reasserted his faith in the death of Jesus as the "exclusive, adequate, and final efficacy in the doing away with sin".[59] Privately Denney's contempt for New Theology was even more

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[55] R.J.Campbell et al, New Theology and Applied Religion, Report of the Proceedings of the Summer School, held from August 3rd - 9th 1907, London 1907, p.4.

[56] Campbell, New Theology, p.7.

[57] Campbell, New Theology, p.11.

[58] Campbell, New Theology, pp.49-50.

[59] British Weekly, 28th March 1907.

pronounced. He wrote to Nicoll that in one way it could be "represented as a systematic debasement of the Christian currency".[60]

Denney described Campbell's book as "even more acutely at issue with historic Christianity" than expected and was alarmed by its apparent flirtation with Pantheism.[61] Campbell had told an audience that no doctrine of God could be framed which was "not at the same time a doctrine of man, for we know nothing of God except as we read him in man".[62] The City Temple Minister's decision to join the I.L.P. - as the true Catholic Church - further ruffled Nicoll as Campbell had apparently "sneered at the idea that the business of the Church is to prepare souls for heaven;" arguing that it was "earth that is to be turned into heaven". Again Nicoll asserted that if the "aspiration of man were satisfied by the better food, better wages, better houses, better health, and less work, to what depths would man have sunk!"[63] Denney wrote "I was glad to see you meant to discuss the practical situation created by *The New Theology*. For my own part, I cannot think it will be a serious situation very long".[64]

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[60] Denney to Nicoll, 23rd March 1907, in Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.85.

[61] British Weekly, 21st March 1907. Darlow has recorded that about this time Nicoll declared to a friend, "If I had my choice, I would rather my children were taught Sacerdotalism than Pantheism." Darlow, op.cit., p.195.

[62] Campbell, New Theology, p.15.

[63] British Weekly, 4th April 1907.

[64] Denney to Nicoll, 1st April 1907, in Letters of Denney to Nicoll, pp.86-7.

In the political sphere the Government had failed to get an agreement on its 1906 Education Bill and the Royal Commission which had been set up to stall the Welsh Disestablishment debate was coming under criticism in the Welsh press. Early in March 1907 a motion in favour of disestablishment of the Church of England and Wales was passed in the House of Commons by a majority of 108. The British Weekly declared this "an event of no small importance," proving that the question was very much alive, although not yet practical politics.[65] But the Government was not pro-active in the campaign and by the end of May the British Weekly was calling for a revolt of the Nonconformist M.P.s It warned the Government not to take for granted the support of the Free Churches when it paid no attention to Nonconformist politicians and failed to distribute honours to Nonconformist citizens.[66]

Having received no obvious response from the Government, the British Weekly directed its attack on Lloyd George for his abandonment of Welsh concerns.[67] It was at this time the M.P. began his concerted attempts to secure British Weekly support which, his biographer claims, "became such an important weapon in Lloyd George's arsenal in the years between 1907 and 1914 that one wonders how he

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[65] British Weekly, 7th March 1907.

[66] British Weekly, 30th May 1907. Lloyd George told Herbert Lewis that he suspected that the leader was the consequence of Nicoll feeling neglected. Nicoll had apparently invited Lloyd George to dinner and the Minister had either forgotten to reply or failed to appear. Gilbert, Lloyd George, 1863-1912, pp.306-7, p.309.

[67] British Weekly, 6th June 1907.

could have been so casual about it before".[68] Lloyd George wrote to his wife in July telling her of Nicoll's opinion that he (Lloyd George), "was the only Minister who had made a reputation as a Minister and that everyone was talking of [him] as the next Liberal Prime Minister". The British Weekly editor also relayed the view of the Rev. H. Elvet Lewis that concerning the agitation over Welsh Disestablishment, "the Welsh people won't give up on Lloyd George lightly - they are proud of him & besides they have no substitute".[69] However Lloyd George told Herbert Lewis that Nicoll had also warned him of the many letters received by the British Weekly criticising the President of the Board of Trade. These letters were apparently unsigned and therefore were not published by the British Weekly.[70] Nicoll's private warning to Lloyd George was extended to the public rebuke in his newspaper the following September which accused Lloyd George of having lost his interest in Welsh Disestablishment and having "yielded to the breath of officialdom". It urged the Nonconformist Convention, meeting in Cardiff, to insist that the Fourth Session of Parliament bring in legislation for Disestablishment and Disendowment in Wales. Lloyd George was warned:

> whatever he does, the Welsh Nonconformists have the power of bringing the Government to reason and obtaining the satisfaction of their religious

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[68] Gilbert, Lloyd George, 1863-1914, p.308.

[69] Lloyd George to Margaret, 31st July 1907, Lloyd George Papers, N.L.W., 20428c/1247, in Gilbert, Lloyd George, 1863-1912, p.309.

[70] J.H.Lewis papers, N.L.W., 10/231, Diary Extract, 7th August 1907, in Gilbert, Lloyd George, 1863-1912, p.309.

> claims. They will not forget that vague promises, patriotic tall talk, and good intentions are materials for the pavement of Hell.[71]

The article prompted Lloyd George to write to Nicoll suggesting an interview in the next issue of the British Weekly.[72] In the piece which followed Lloyd George assured Welsh Nonconformists that he had not forgotten Disestablishment and that if Parliament ran its normal course then Welsh claims would certainly be met. However he pressed his view that the House of Lords was the real enemy of Disestablishment. Without interference from the Second Chamber, he argued, such a strong Liberal Government would certainly have a commitment to religious equality. In its introduction to the piece on Lloyd George the British Weekly added the warning that, "some opponents [of Lloyd George] have dared to hint that his personal prospects and position might influence him to the abandonment of the cause which has ever been nearest to his heart". The newspapers own view, it was implied, was closer to that of Welsh Nonconformity: "the deep affection which Wales feels for Mr. Lloyd George explains the jealousy with which she watches to see whether...he 'steers the most steady course.'"[73] Lloyd George was pleased with the response to the interview having "received letters from

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[71] British Weekly, 26th September 1907.

[72] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 27th September 1907, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.32-3.

[73] British Weekly, 3rd October 1907.

all parts of Wales expressing gratification".[74] The British Weekly's rediscovered confidence in Lloyd George's integrity was not simply the result of his convincing argument. Nicoll's comment - in another part of the newspaper - that he would not be surprised if Lloyd George were to say that a Disestablishment Bill was being prepared, suggested he was privy to private information conveyed during the interview.[75] The British Weekly was evidently prepared to support Lloyd George on the understanding that the battle over the House of Lords was not simply another diversion from the central Free Church issue of religious equality. Despite his desire to disengage himself from the tangles of sectarian controversy Lloyd George told Robert Perks that if, by 1909, the Government had not passed on to the Lords a Welsh Disestablishment Bill he would leave the administration.[76]

iv. A Battle with the Lords and the Peoples' Budget:

The British Weekly continued to press for Welsh Disestablishment but the emphasis of the debate was now the House of Lords. In the 1890s the British Weekly had not been a campaigner for reform of the Lords, believing that

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[74] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 6th October 1907, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.34-36.

[75] Gilbert, Lloyd George, 1863-1912, p.310.

[76] Perks to Rosebery, 26th November 1907, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10053, f.60.

other policies should be given priority.[77] In a leader examining the need for reform within the Liberal party, in December 1898, the British Weekly was scathing of calls for the reform of the second chamber. It argued against the wisdom of putting such a policy before the country without an alternative which was necessarily better, and called "ridiculous" the Scottish M.P. John Lang's proposal that the Lords' veto be ineffective after the Third Reading of a Bill. The British Weekly argued that the veto was a necessary check on legislation - such as Home Rule - which was at odds with the will of the country. According to this view the Lords acted as a buffer against Bills passed by smaller and smaller minorities.[78]

In 1906 consistent with the British Weekly's determination to see the Liberals and Labour in a Progressive coalition, it depicted the Lords as the true opposition within a year of the Liberals taking office.[79] However it was the ability of the Lords to obstruct Nonconformist legislation which was the real force behind the British Weekly's campaign against the Second Chamber. The destruction of Birrell's Education Bill in December 1906 underlined the full extent of the Lord's power and forced reform of the Second Chamber to the top of the Free Church agenda. By the beginning of 1907 the British Weekly was calling on the Government to lay before the country a

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[77] British Weekly, 30th August 1894.

[78] British Weekly, 29th December 1898.

[79] British Weekly, 11th October 1906.

policy for dealing with the Lords.[80] In December Lloyd George wrote to Nicoll in agreement with the editor's view that the Liberal party should take up the challenge of the Lords promptly and effectively or falter under torrents of ridicule. Lloyd George told Nicoll of his conviction that the Liberal party could win its fight with the Lords, but only if it adhered to a strategy: "Let us challenge the Lords on our finance and if they decline the challenge they are beaten and if they accept it they will be beaten. In either event we win".[81]

The following year the House of Lords threw out the Licensing Bill and the British Weekly heightened its attack and called on the Liberals to take on a conflict "which must be carried on till the House of Lords is deprived of all powers but the power of revision". It further warned, "If the Liberal party were in any way to shirk this battle, it need never ask to be returned to power again".[82] Two weeks later the British Weekly led with the view that "The question of the House of Lords is in a particular manner a question for Nonconformists". It announced to Nonconformists that:

> The time has come when they must merge their special contentions with the great issue which swallows up all others,...Nonconformists are in a special way trustees for the protection and extension of civil and religious liberty. They are confronted and balked once again by the immemorial and inveterate enemies of freedom, and

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[80] British Weekly, 7th February 1907.

[81] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 21st December 1907, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.44-47.

[82] British Weekly, 3rd December 1908.

they must defend their trust.

The power of the Second Chamber had become the most pressing political issue and the British Weekly declared, "We will vote for the candidate who is against the present veto of the House of Lords and we shall not trouble too much about the rest of his opinions".[83] The following month the British Weekly agreed with other Liberal newspapers that the Government was not giving the party enough of a lead on the House of Lords.[84] It also began a six week series by Stoddart, "Against the Referendum" which considered different plebiscite models and objected to the mechanism on the grounds of expense and the fact that it would present the opposition with another weapon.[85]

Lloyd George's "Peoples' Budget" brought the debate to a head. It was a bid to draw into the Exchequer the funds for both Dreadnoughts and Old Age Pensions, while maintaining the validity of Free Trade economics. Nicoll was also privy to the contingency plan which was, if necessary, to provoke the Lords into a battle over its moral right to hamper or dictate legislation in an evolving democracy. The British Weekly fully supported Lloyd George's radical economic proposals. It did what it could to assuage the anxieties of its middle class readership which might fear that the proposals represented the revolution foretold by Lord Rosebery in the House of Lords.

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[83] British Weekly, 17th December 1908.

[84] British Weekly, 28th January 1909.

[85] British Weekly, 21st January - 25th February 1909.

The possibility of an alliance between Liberal Leaguers and Free Trading Unionists also made it necessary to mobilise all support for the Budget because it created the threat of an anti- Budget alliance within the Liberal party.[86]

The British Weekly anticipated that the Budget would re-animate the Liberalism of the British people.[87] The prospect that the Lords would reject the Welsh Disestablishment Bill also meant that Welshmen would be "more firmly together in their resolution to give themselves no rest till the baneful power of the Upper Houses [was] taken away".[88] Fearful that opponents of the Budget would appeal to the working class with the offer of cheap beer and tobacco, the British Weekly clarified the Liberal position that the working class should be freed from taxation on their necessities.[89]

However direct taxation is generally more beneficial to the working class; it was the middle classes which had to be made to feel safe within the Liberal party. The People's Budget was specifically designed to protect the majority of the middle class from increased taxation. The Licence duties and land value taxes were also an attempt to

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[86] Gilbert, Lloyd George, 1863-1912, p.375.

[87] British Weekly, 25th February 1909.

[88] British Weekly, 29th April 1909. In June the lack of progress in the Disestablishment Bill prompted another call to Liberals to give their whole hearted support to the Government in its current battle with the Lords. British Weekly, 17th June 1909.

[89] British Weekly, 6th May 1909.

appeal to traditional middle class reformers.[90] Nicoll's role was to interpret these benefits for his readership as the British Weekly peddled the party's official line.

Readers were reminded that the "real" issue of the Budget was between rich and poor; with the rich wanting to shift the burden of taxation to the people. The British Weekly made it plain that by rich it meant that band of "hardly a million people" who paid income tax and who therefore had an income of at least £163 a year. It was important to emphasise that Liberals were the friends of both the middle and working classes while Protectionists wanted to shift the burden of taxation to people like the "ordinary business man struggling with constant difficulties".[91] This theme was returned to continually: "If the opponents of the Budget had their way," taxes would be laid on those who can least afford it and to the middle class "no mercy would be shown".[92]

Lloyd George wrote to encourage Nicoll and assured him that his article of the 27th May, which had appeared at "just the right moment," was, "a real battle cry & will help us enormously at this juncture...We are in for a long and critical fight and the fortunes of Liberalism hang in

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[90] B.K.Murray, The Peoples' Budget 1909/10: Lloyd George and Liberal Politics, Oxford 1980, pp.4-5.

[91] British Weekly, 20th May 1909.

[92] British Weekly, 1st July 1909. This piece was also included in the pamphlet by Nicoll, "One Fight More: The Best and the Last," reprinted from the British Weekly, London 1910.

the balance".[93] The Budget League was established with Haldane and Churchill at the helm. The British Weekly declared it to have "begun its operations in a very satisfactory and promising way...to win the struggle we need the spade work as well as the oratory".[94] The newspaper wanted the Government to be seen to be in control. It recalled that before the Budget the Liberals were losing strength; this was partly due to the actions of the Upper House but also due to the tameness of the Government in accepting these rebuffs.[95]

At the beginning of August Lloyd George delivered his Limehouse address at which he presented the Budget as an unequivocal attack on the Peers and evaded a discussion on detailed taxation. The British Weekly described the speech as, "one of his most brilliant, weighty and telling," and endorsed the Chancellor's view that land ownership brought with it responsibility to villages and neighbourhoods which if abdicated would bring about a revaluation of the system. It reiterated that the Government was "not proposing a revolution. It [was] proposing, on the contrary, very mild and moderate measures with much forbearance, and in a pacific spirit," concluding, "The Budget is safe in Mr. Lloyd George's hands".[96]

On 30th July, Nicoll had summarised his position for

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[93] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 6th June 1909, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.50-51.

[94] British Weekly, 8th July 1909.

[95] British Weekly, 29th July 1909.

[96] British Weekly, 5th August 1909.

James Denney:

> We are now in the thick of a fight about the Budget. The main point is the taxation of unearned increment on land, which is being fought by the moneyed classes with fury. On this point I am whole-heartedly with the Government, and have even found a kind of pleasure in writing political articles - a thing I almost always detest. The forces appear to be pretty equally matched. But the Liberals are getting into heart again, and they really have something to fight about. In all likelihood the House of Lords will throw out the Budget and risk everything. So we shall have lively times to look forward to. I am glad of it for I like a good hot controversy when I am sure of my side.[97]

On the 5th August Nicoll addressed the Free Churches directly in a piece entitled, "Nonconformists and the Budget". The British Weekly piece was written to refute in part the view, put forward later in the newspaper by the M.P. Compton Rickett, that the Government should go for an early dissolution. Compton Rickett referred to the position of Nonconformists who were bitterly disappointed that none of their hopes in the new Government had been realised. "If their hopes could not all be realised at the outset," he suggested, "at least they expected to see the passive resister delivered from the degradation of the police-court and the country schools redeemed from their denominational bias".[98]

The British Weekly set out its counter case with the primary belief that the Lords would throw out the Budget. It reasoned that Nonconformists would not reject the

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[97] Nicoll to Denney, 30th July 1909, in Darlow, op.cit., p.208.

[98] British Weekly, 5th August 1909.

Government for one which would be an oppressive oligarchy of 600 which would do nothing for the Free Churches. Nonconformists, it continued, believed that the true antidote to revolution was to be found in timely and moderate measures of reform, and they knew that the Budget was a most moderate measure: "Not that Nonconformists would say that revolution can always be avoided". The British Weekly claimed that it did not believe there would be a dissolution in 1909 and it concluded with the reassurance to its readership that a Government which was fighting the House of Lords would not fail in its duty to Nonconformists, and to the principle of religious equality. The tone of the piece, which suggested that the editor was privy to some politician's thoughts, concluded with confirmation that Nicoll had important contacts. The British Weekly divulged that an Education Bill and a Welsh Disestablishment Bill were being discussed in a new way by a Government now confident that such legislation would not forever be blocked by the House of Lords.[99]

Nicoll's efforts did not go unnoticed by Lloyd George nor did the significance of the part the editor had to play. In September Lloyd George wrote to Nicoll thanking him for his valuable work:

> I am delighted to find that you are taking steps to organise the Free Churches for the coming conflict, the issue of which means so much to them. Without their zealous cooperation in every constituency, we cannot hope to win; at least the victory would be such a doubtful one as to leave us weak, embarrassed and impotent.
> I believe the Budget has secured the enthusiasm

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[99] British Weekly, 5th August 1909.

> of the vast majority of the working men of the kingdom; but it is Nonconformity alone that can bring the middle class to our aid. It is not enough to secure a majority: we must have such a majority as will convince the House of Lords, the Tory Party and even the Sovereign that there is nothing to hope for in manoeuvring for a further appeal to the people.[100]

The crux of the relationship between Nicoll and Lloyd George was that the editor represented a direct line to the Nonconformist middle classes. After the death of Price Hughes in 1902 Nicoll was the most important editor of a religious Free Church journal and he was trusted by Dissenters as an editor who gave their interests prime concern. An endorsement from Nicoll helped to give Lloyd George's policies a respectability in Free Church circles. The Passive Resistance campaign over the 1902 Education Act, although a debacle in the eyes of those outside the Free Churches, had established Nicoll as a man who understood the political potential of Dissent. It was important to Lloyd George that Nicoll translate the economic and constitutional debate into terms which would directly relate to the Nonconformist experience.

Nicoll was not simply a mouth piece for Lloyd George. He had come to believe that the House of Lords was an enemy of religious equality. Although perhaps not fully convinced that the Liberal party would deliver on Nonconformist grievances, Nicoll wanted to render dead all of its excuses. Of significance again was Nicoll's determination that the Free Churches should maintain a high

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[100] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 9th September 1909, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.52-55.

profile in their support for the Liberal party thus giving their demands greater weight. Lloyd George understood this well. He wrote to Nicoll:

> The destruction of the veto of the Lords means so much to the Free Churches that I cannot help thinking that they will realize that it is their special business to make the greatest concerted effort they have ever yet put forth. Everything is possible for them in the domain of Government with the Lords out of the way: nothing worth accomplishing will ever be done as long as that House remains with uncrippled strength to frustrate, to thwart and to destroy. It is not merely that you cannot get an Education Bill, or a Licensing Bill, or a Disestablishment Bill through the House of Lords, but the mere fact of their presence there and the knowledge of the powers which they possess influence Radical Ministers in the shaping of the Bills which they submit to the judgement of Parliament.[101]

Lloyd George also congratulated Nicoll on his decision to bring out a book on "Nonconformity and the House of Lords" noting, "We stand sadly in need of something of that kind, and a striking case would be of enormous value in the fight. That is the reason why I am delighted to find that you are taking it in hand".[102] The pamphlet was in fact called, "One Fight More: the best and the last," and included British Weekly articles from the second half of 1909. Learning from his experience with the Education Act, Lloyd George was keen to coordinate support for the party from the Free Church leaders. He warned Nicoll:

> As to the organisation itself, the start is

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[101] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 9th September 1909, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.52-55.

[102] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 9th September 1909, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.52-55.

> everything. Clifford is a first rate fighting man, and there could be no better General appointed to command the Nonconformist forces in this expedition against the House of Lords; but it is highly important that all the picked men of the Free Churches should be associated with him from the start. That will secure the success of the organisation from the outset.[103]

Through the Free Church leaders Lloyd George could mobilise the support of the middle class for his Budget without adopting the language of class politics. Nicoll was reluctant to accept that Church and Chapel had ceased to be the most important factor in determining political allegiance. He was encouraged by Lloyd George whose slogan "Peers vs. People" was a simplified representation of British society which did not take into account the many inequalities which divided "the people". The eventual defeat of the House of Lords; a bloodless coup in which the third Estate seized power from the First and Second, was a victory for the bourgeoisie. Whether this was Church or Chapel going middle class ceased to matter to all but a few stalwarts like Nicoll.[104] And even Nicoll was becoming more secular. In the summer of 1909 Denney wrote a leader for the British Weekly, "The Church and Legislation", which concluded that the Church's direct interest was not in framing Acts of Parliament, but "in regenerating men, who

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[103] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 9th September 1909, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.52-55.

[104] In October the British Weekly ran an unsubtle leader, "Christ's attitude to Money" in which its readers were reminded of Jesus' advice to the rich young man, "One thing that thou lackest: go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and come and follow me." British Weekly, 28th October 1909.

will give expression, indeed, to their new life, in their laws as in all their activities".[105] Nicoll opined that the article was too unqualified in its conclusions. He suggested that there were "occasions when the Christian Church is called upon to take a side in politics as a Church, and I think it is an omission that you do not sufficiently insist on Christians taking part in politics".[106]

v. Conclusion:

The concerns of the British Weekly remained largely consistent after 1906: education reform and Welsh Disestablishment. However once Liberals had formed a government Nicoll's relationship with the political world necessarily changed. Following the general disillusionment of Nonconformists with the ineffectiveness of Liberals in office Nicoll did not remain on the margins but moved instead towards the centres of power. Parnell had preached of the dangers of an independent Irish party which remained

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[105] British Weekly, 19th August 1909.

[106] Nicoll to Denney, 30th July 1909, in Darlow, op.cit., p.207. On 30th September 1909 Denney wrote: "I saw you had some letters about the article on the Church and Legislation....I had quite a lot of letters about it too - more than about any casual thing I ever wrote. Most of them were evidently from evangelical old tory gentlemen, who adore your religion AND abhor your politics, and I felt bound in common honesty to point out to some of them that what I wrote about was not the B.W. and Legislation, but the Church and Legislation, and that in point of fact I was on your side in politics as well as in religion, and only meant that while politics had a place of their own the Church was not that place." Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.144.

indefinitely at Parliament and in 1890 wrote that their integrity and independence had been apparently "sapped and destroyed by the wirepullers of the English Liberal party".[107] Similarly, eternal faddism was difficult for Nicoll to sustain and he gradually accepted a position in the political sphere where his influence was more palpable. The British Weekly continued to play down the significance of other sectional interests within the party. It wanted an end to Irish influence in the light of the Liberal majority and represented the Labourists as part of a large progressive presence in Parliament.

Lloyd George recognised the usefulness of a polemical Free Church journalist and this association allowed Nicoll to become more politically active while hiding behind Lloyd George's high profile as a Welsh Nonconformist. The relationship became more concentrated after the British Weekly's attacks on Lloyd George in 1907 when the M.P. recognised the value of using the newspaper to appease his natural supporters. The intransigence of the House of Lords helped to broaden the immediate political debate for the Free Churches and Nicoll presented the curbing of the power of the Second Chamber as a specific duty of Nonconformists. This brought him into the campaign for the People's Budget.

Nicoll had never been as interested in social reform as other Liberal Imperialists. He could accept the need for a degree of state intervention but as his position

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[107] Freeman's Journal, 29th November 1890, in Lyons, "Political Ideas of Parnell," p.751.

during the debate in 1907 over the New Theology illustrated, he maintained the type of literal Evangelicalism which kept him emotionally detached from the social reform debate. The British Weekly "strongly approve[d]" of old age pensions, hailing the measure as "a great step towards justice"[108] and accepted that society had a responsibility towards the deserving poor, but always there was the question of who was going to pay. For Nicoll the great advantage of the People's Budget (and later land campaign) was that it specifically attempted to fund social reform without injury to middle-income earners.

Support for the Budget represented a gradual shift on Nicoll's part away from primarily religious politics. His newspaper declared that if the National Free Church Council did not take a stand on the Budget "there are multitudes who will feel that the Council has served its day, and must be replaced by a new organisation".[109] By 1909 the British Weekly was pressing overtly party political economic policies and for his efforts Nicoll was knighted in November of that year.[110] This symbolised the editor's temporary embracement of the political world with a rather blunted Nonconformist critique which lasted until the First World War.

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[108] British Weekly, 16th July 1908.

[109] British Weekly, 18th November 1909.

[110] Darlow, op.cit., p.210.

CHAPTER FIVE

TROUBLE IN LIBERAL ENGLAND

Two General Elections in 1910 gave the Liberals a slim mandate for their progressive tax proposals and for the curbing of the power of the House of Lords. For many Dissenters these issues seemed far removed from their traditional interests and by the end of 1910 there was a noted fragmentation in Nonconformist political support. Despite the efforts of the British Weekly many Dissenters no longer felt emotionally bound to the struggles of the Liberal party. Nicoll also recognised that the record of the party on Free Church issues was lacking but as in 1886 he did not see abandonment of the Liberal party as a solution. The importance of the party to him was underlined by his reaction to the constitutional conference of 1910 when he deplored the idea of coalition. Nicoll saw the curbing of the House of Lords veto as vital to the Nonconformist interest. Consequently he consolidated his position with Lloyd George and the British Weekly became even more of a propagandiser for the Liberal party.

This chapter looks at the New Liberalism of the British Weekly as it is manifest in responses to the primary political issues which arose between 1910 and 1914. Industrial unrest forced Nicoll to take a definite stand on the minimum wage and government intervention in trade disputes and the issue of female suffrage revealed the innate conservatism of the British Weekly and its editor. The National Insurance Bill and the Land Campaign confirmed the extent to which Nicoll moved in the Lloyd George political orbit and the editor's support for Catholics in Ireland further emphasised the importance of party loyalty

in his thinking.

i. Two Elections and the Threat of Coalition:

Once the Lords had rejected the Budget the British Weekly declared that the supreme battle for liberty had begun.[1] In the run up to the consequent General Election it foretold of a country under Unionist rule which would be undemocratic, impoverished and at war with Germany. Conversely a Liberal victory signalled an end to the tyranny of the Lords which would in turn open the way for a programme of social reform and the redressing of Nonconformist grievances.[2] The Liberals were returned as the largest party, but with no overall majority. The British Weekly assured its readership, "The fact which matters is that we are back again. Our reverses have been many and severe, but our victories have been glorious".[3] Nicoll wrote to Denney revealing the strength of his involvement in the party:

> Personally I am quite satisfied with the result of the elections. Lloyd George and Churchill calculated on a Coalition majority of 140-20 more than they have won; but the Cabinet was quite prepared for the Irish holding the balance, and I have great confidence that Asquith will conduct the negotiations with the King firmly and suavely. But we must re-organize the Liberal Press, and it can now be done far more easily

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[1] British Weekly, 9th December 1909.

[2] British Weekly, 6th January 1910. This leader was reprinted in pamphlet form for free distribution.

[3] British Weekly, 27th January 1910.

> than ten years ago. I hope to have a hand in this.[4]

Not all Free Church Liberals could be so sanguine. Robert Perks wrote to Wemyss Reid:

> Politics is a strange and disappointing business - no loyalty, no sincerity, no moderation - everyone fighting for his own hand - and lying everywhere! even in the "religious" press. Apart from Ireland, Scotland, and Wales - the verdict of England is against Lloyd George. When the Irish Catholics demand, as they will, their pound of flesh I shall stand alongside the Irish Protestants : and not again make the mistake of 1886 and 1892.[5]

Where there was no anger there was often ennui. Denney had written nothing about the election, "not because I am not on the Liberal side, but because I have no business to, nor anything particular to say".[6] Neither was Nicoll's patience infinite. In February 1910 Nicoll wrote to Hodder-Williams, "We want to get the Government to take up the House of Lords Veto first and at the same time we do not want to be put in a position of seeming to antagonise them whatever they do. I fear they will take up the Budget and get into all sorts of trouble, and freeze up

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[4] Nicoll to Denney, 31st January 1910, in Darlow, op.cit., p.212.

[5] Perks to Wemyss Reid, 22nd January 1910, Robert Perks Papers, John Rylands University Library, Manchester. This was not an altogether surprising admission. Perks had been considering setting up a middle group with Unionist Free Traders based on Free Trade and Anti-Socialism. Perks to Rosebery, 21st September 1908, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10053, f.63. It had also been clear that cooperation was not possible between Rosebery and his Vice Presidents in the Liberal League after the introduction of the Peoples' Budget. Asquith to Rosebery, 14th September 1909, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS.10001, ff.134-5.

[6] Denney to Nicoll, 5th January 1910, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.151.

enthusiasm, but we shall see..."[7] In March the British Weekly warned that Progressive supporters of the Government had been "disappointed with the serious and conspicuous blunders of the start [of the Session]".[8]

Liberals had been calling for the reform of the House of Lords for decades. In 1910 they finally had it within their power to force the issue; but it emerged that behind the Liberal rhetoric there was little understanding or agreement on what form the onslaught on the Lords should take. Nicoll favoured limitation of the veto and was opposed to any other measures which would reform the Upper House without significantly reducing its power. Asquith announced in April 1910 that the Liberal Government would feel forced to dissolve Parliament or resign if the Lords failed to accept the veto policy: "in no case would we [the Government] recommend dissolution except in such circumstances as will secure that in the new Parliament the judgement of the people as expressed in the general election will be carried into law".[9] The British Weekly was greatly encouraged by the Prime Minister's firm stand. It declared, "The effect on Liberalism has been extraordinary. The cloud has lifted at the words of truth and earnestness, and the spell bound world has been disenchanted...The past is as if it had never been. Our leaders have been given back to us to receive a support

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[7] Nicoll to Hodder-Williams, 4th February 1910, Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,370.

[8] British Weekly, 10th March 1910.

[9] British Weekly, 21st April 1910.

which for loyalty and enthusiasm can never be exceeded".[10]

The clouds gathered again two weeks later on the death on the King. Garvin called in the Observer for politicians to lay party passions aside and sign a truce of God over the King's grave.[11] The British Weekly did not immediately respond to Garvin's plea but subsequently showed little enthusiasm for the Constitutional Conference which was formally proposed by Asquith in a letter to Balfour on 9th June 1910. The new King used his influence to encourage conciliation and therefore it was difficult for the British Weekly to oppose openly the inter-party negotiations.[12]

The Conference involved Asquith, Lloyd George, Crewe, Birrell, Balfour, Lansdowne, Austen Chamberlain and Cawdor. The British Weekly concluded that Liberals of all schools were satisfied with the representation: Birrell "fitly' stood for the Irish Nationalists and "Labourists [would] be pleased to leave their interests in the hands of Mr. Lloyd George".[13] Nevertheless Nicoll found it difficult to bury his antagonism for the Opposition, warning against the continuing propaganda of the Protectionists. The British Weekly noted that the chief peril of such Conferences was that individual members of the Liberal party might commit themselves to concessions which the party could not endorse. Nicoll was an opponent of the referendum and was

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[10] British Weekly, 21st April 1910.

[11] Observer, 8th May 1910, in J.Grigg, People's Champion, p.259.

[12] Lloyd George to Margaret, 9th May 1910, in K.O.Morgan, Lloyd George Family Letters 1885-1936, London 1973, p.152.

[13] British Weekly, 23rd June 1910.

concerned that some sort of compromise might be reached which was based on a plebiscite. His great fear however was that a concession would be made on the Liberals' commitment to limit the power of veto in the House of Lords. The British Weekly warned the Liberal leadership that they would split the ranks and fall upon the sword if they agreed to a reform of the Upper House which did not curb its veto.[14]

The Constitutional Conference was abandoned at the end of July although there were a few more meetings in November. The germ of inter-party cooperation had been laid in the mind of Lloyd George and throughout August 1910 the Chancellor concocted his own solution to the constitutional, social and economic problems which beset the ever wearier titan. Lloyd George's memorandum of August 17th was a call to the most competent men on both sides of the House (judged by him to be no more than half a dozen in each party) to sink their differences and re-organise the national life of the country in all its branches. These branches were listed: Housing, Drink, Insurance, Unemployment, The Poor Law, National Re-organisation, National Defence, Local Government, Trade, Land, Imperial Problems and Foreign Affairs. As the memorandum was a bid to convince Unionists that cooperation was possible, Lloyd George hinted at compromise over fiercely partisan subjects such as Home Rule and Tariff

[14] British Weekly, 16th June 1910.

Reform.[15]

Lloyd George implied that Nonconformists would not be allowed to use their influence within the Liberal party to thwart progress. He foresaw that no settlement would be possible:

> without exciting a good many ill-formed prejudices, some of them with an historical basis. They cannot be argued with, they cannot be voted down; but they are extremely pernicious in their influence upon the settlement of a difficult and complex problem. Separate action means that a Party in opposition is driven into enlisting the support of these prejudices, whether it wishes to do so or not: the more extreme men amongst their own supporters on the platform and in the Press always take advantage of these elements, however enlightened a view the Party leaders may take. Joint action will enable a Government based on the strength of the two Parties to ignore these prejudices.[16]

Areas of compromise in the Chancellor's memorandum which would inevitably incur the wrath of Radical Nonconformists were temperance and education. He argued that if both parties cooperated they could arrive at a solution which, "whilst treating vested interest fairly, and even generously, would advance the cause of national sobriety". The British Weekly had long been opposed to generous compensation for publicans. Lloyd George also suggested that the question of education could be dealt with more satisfactorily by a coalition because both parties were "committed to certain controversial solutions which may not be the very best".

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[15] Copy sent from Lloyd George to Austen Chamberlain, 29th January 1815, Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., C/3/14/8, pp.1-9.

[16] Ibid.

Lloyd George proceeded cautiously with his plan for national rejuvenation. Having revealed his scheme to Churchill in October the Chancellor approached F.E. Smith from the Opposition; with Smith's support Balfour was informed of Lloyd George's proposals. The leader of the Unionists was encouraged and the privy circle was extended to a few M.P.s including Asquith, Haldane, Birrell, Grey, Austin Chamberlain, the Master of Elibank, Crewe and Bonar Law. The only journalist to be treated to information of the coalition talks was Garvin.[17]

Lloyd George gave an important speech to the non-political Liberal Christian League in October. The speech, which concentrated on social waste, was well received on all sides. The British Weekly reported that Lloyd George "very boldly, and in an original way" had appropriated Joseph Chamberlain's main contentions: that Britain was in an evil plight which could only be healed by radical and revolutionary change. Lloyd George argued that this change could only take place without consideration for vested interests and through bold and comprehensive action on the part of the State. The Chancellor pinpointed the three areas of national waste as armaments, land and idle rich. "My counsel to the people would be this", Lloyd George concluded, "let them enlarge the purpose of their politics, and, having done so, let them adhere to that purpose with unswerving resolve through all difficulties and

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[17] Grigg, From Peace to War 1912-1916, London 1985, p.267.

discouragements until their redemption is accomplished".[18] Within the context of his memorandum and his discussions with Unionist leaders, Lloyd George was clearly calling on the nation to rise above party politics until Britain's troubled waters had been negotiated by its most able men.

The British Weekly misconstrued the Chancellor's meaning. This interpretation of Lloyd George's closing words was offered to the newspaper's readership: "He means that the working classes should return to Parliament those who will promote their interests. All that is done outside of Parliament amounts to very little. In Parliament, given a large and resolute majority, anything may be done".[19] The British Weekly did not understand the full implication of Lloyd George's recognition of the influence of Joseph Chamberlain. His predecessor had found it virtually impossible to be confined by the rigidity of party politics but in 1910 was well ensconced in the Unionist camp. Those who heard Lloyd George's address were free to connect his references to the spirit of Radical Liberalism or to reconstructed Unionism.

The official Constitutional Conference was resumed at the beginning of November. Asquith announced that those involved had come to an agreement which could not be made effective "unless and until it [had] approved itself to the opinion and judgement of the country". The British Weekly assumed this to mean that rumours of a federal agreement for Ireland were inaccurate and that if the Conference did

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[18] British Weekly, 20th October 1910.

[19] British Weekly, 20th October 1910.

agree to practical conclusions these would not become law until after a general election. The British Weekly believed that any consensus reached by the moderate members of the Conference which was put to the country might be opposed by extremists in Conservative, Radical and Labour circles. It was throughout very sceptical about the advantages of inter-party discussions and of the suggestion that the Conference be followed by another secret Convention of eighty persons to discuss Home Rule and the House of Lords. It remarked (not intentionally for Lloyd George's benefit), "These secret conferences are not after the British tradition, and so far as the Liberals are concerned excite no enthusiasm".[20]

Throughout the six months between the King's death and the breakdown of the Constitutional Conference in November the British Weekly was out of step with the thinking of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Nicoll's attention was focused on the House of Lords while for Lloyd George the problems of the British Empire did not all rest with a stubborn Upper Chamber. "Liberals, we believe," the British Weekly commented on the anticipated collapse of the Constitutional Conference, "will cheerfully accept its failure, and will insist on a resolute return to the veto resolutions". British Weekly readers were given no hint of Lloyd George's flirtation with a coalition. In a conversation with Harold Begbie, Lloyd George reaffirmed that Liberalism was the true force of evolution in politics. He spoke of "a live Liberalism. The old,

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[20] British Weekly, 3rd November 1910.

sleepy and half-Conservative Liberalism is dead. Liberalism to-day is young, wide-awake, alert, and conscious of an ideal. It is capturing the imagination of the people". The Chancellor's definition of Liberalism was, "surely the drawing together of all the best elements in a nation for the moral and physical well-being of the whole State".[21] But in the face of national insolvency Lloyd George decided to look beyond party political Liberalism and draw the best elements from Unionists and Protectionists.

The failure of the leaders of the main political parties to reach agreement led to the collapse of Asquith's and Lloyd George's attempts at nonpartisan cooperation. The result was a second election in 1910 on the question of the House of Lords. Nicoll's correspondence with Ernest Hodder-Williams reveals the extent of the disillusionment endemic among Liberal lobbyists at this point:

> I think the Liberals will get in, but even if they don't they have a splendid chance, and perhaps a better chance than if they got in. Think of Balfour jettisoning Tariff Reform! Think of the difficulties the Tories would have to face. Think of the chances the Opposition would have. We must fight the fight fair and stand by our colours. But if I were searched to the deeps of my heart, I should scarcely know on which side I should wish victory to fall. At any rate, you and I know very well that politicians on either side have done nothing for us, so keep quiet.[22]

Despite such private reservations about the Liberal

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[21] British Weekly, 24th November 1910.

[22] Nicoll to Ernest Hodder-Williams, 30th November 1910, Hodder and Stoughton Papers, G.L., MS.16,370.

party's commitment to the Free Churches his newspaper showed no signs of wavering in its support. This was particularly significant in view of the fact that Dissenting voices in the press and pulpit were not depicting Nonconformity as an issue at the election.[23] The British Weekly recognised that it was an election in which every vote would count and its one hope was that Nonconformists would organise and send a large number of Dissenters back to Parliament so that there would be "a far more unanimous and enthusiastic Nonconformist party".[24] It reminded Nonconformists of their duty, taking the view that with the election everything Dissenters had struggled for through weary centuries was now within their reach:

> Let everyone rise to the occasion. Let everyone do his own duty, and also do his utmost to spread the light and bring others with him. A triumph at this critical hour will be a triumph for peace, reconciliation, and unity, as well as for justice.[25]

ii. The "British Weekly" as Propagandist for the Government:

Privately Nicoll had revealed the extent of his disillusionment with the Liberal party but he also showed an enthusiasm for the game of politics which Denney did not share. Nicoll was in a difficult position. He was editor

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[23] Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.119

[24] British Weekly, 24th November 1910.

[25] British Weekly, 1st December 1910.

of Britain's most important Nonconformist newspaper and he could hardly afford to be silent. Again he was faced with the reality that the Liberal party represented the most realistic home for Dissenters and it was in the interests of the Free Churches to maintain a visible presence there. Nevertheless there was a marked decline in the British Weekly's interest in religious/political issues if not in theological issues.

Returning again to office at the end of 1910 without an overall majority the Liberals needed the support not only of Labour, but also the Irish and the Free Churches for political survival. Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment were again high on the agenda. Asquith promised that a Welsh Disestablishment Bill would be given a strong position once the Parliament Bill was passed. The British Weekly accepted that this issue now brought forth only "good humoured apathy" from politicians.[26] When the Welsh Church Bill was introduced the following year the British Weekly gave it a very positive response[27] but was generally more interested in the Irish Home Rule Bill. The First World War revealed that Nicoll was ready to take up the Free Church cudgel once Welsh Disestablishment appeared to be threatened but in the interim the British Weekly involved itself in the broader business of the Liberal party. Its role as provider of Government information was notable in the People's Budget campaign and is further developed in the debates over the proposals for

[26] British Weekly, 16th March 1911.

[27] British Weekly, 2nd May 1912.

the National Insurance Bill.

The first part of the Insurance scheme was introduced in May 1911 and the British Weekly applauded its essentially Christian basis; "the ideas of personal brotherhood, charity, hope for mankind, have the Gospel for their source".[28] In the Commons Austen Chamberlain admitted that the Bill represented an occasion for cooperation.[29] Riddell recalled that himself and Nicoll listened to Lloyd George's speech and were "aghast at the magnitude and complexity of the scheme, and left the House in a dejected condition". He reflected that the Tories would regret their enthusiasm before many weeks had passed: "They have given away the whole show and have acted like idiots. L.G. called Insurance Bill a non-party measure. We shall see".[30] The British Weekly had again misplaced its editor's cynicism, Lloyd George's appeal for cooperation on the Second Reading appeared to lift the Insurance Bill, "high above the muddy waters of party politics".[31]

The Bill proved extremely difficult to sell as the real benefits were not to be felt until February 1913. The British Weekly was frustrated by the Government's inability to educate the public. In June 1911 it supported Chiozza

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[28] British Weekly, 11th May 1911.

[29] House of Commons Debates, XXV, (4th May 1911), cols.609-45, in Gilbert, Lloyd George, 1863-1912, p.438.

[30] 12th December 1911, Riddell Diaries, B.L., MS.62969, ff.136-137. Riddell's memory may be unreliable as this was recalled several months after the event.

[31] British Weekly, 1st June 1911.

Money's criticism that the administration appeared vague and inaccurately briefed.[32] In November the unfavourable outcome of by-elections in Oldham and Somerset further underlined the unpopularity of the legislation. The British Weekly, believing that ignorance was the real enemy, decided to publish a "plain statement" in question and answers on the effect of the Bill - specifically to counter opposition to the inclusion of domestic servants in the measure.[33] The following month it expressed the hope that the "Liberal party [would] see that the Insurance Act [was] thoroughly understood by the country".[34]

The Medical profession put a considerable amount of money into opposing the Insurance Bill and events like the rally of mistresses and servants in the Albert Hall in December 1911 were very poor publicity for the Government. The British Weekly wanted to see the formation of an Insurance League similar to the Budget League which would coordinate meetings and leaflets to promote the scheme.[35] Impatience with the Chancellor's indulgence of critics who reduced the debate to a haggle over small sums brought the response from Lloyd George: "You are right in your Insurance Note...It must be fought out on broad lines".[36] The British Weekly's most comprehensive contribution to the

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[32] British Weekly, 20th June 1911.

[33] British Weekly, 30th November 1911.

[34] British Weekly, 28th December 1911.

[35] British Weekly, 7th March 1912.

[36] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 24th February 1912, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.60-61.

Insurance Campaign was a series in which "a most eminent expert" answered readers' questions on the Act. The series began in June 1912 and ran until the Act was "fairly in working order" the following April.[37]

This series was replaced by a column by the Radical M.P. Chiozza Money which proposed to deal with those problems which had made their way into British political life and therefore "with the fight with poverty which has now begun in earnest".[38] In the first month Money wrote on wages and prices, Dreadnoughts and houses, the nation's raw material and the extraordinary vagaries of the rural wage.[39] It was through this column that the British Weekly expressed its original thinking on social reform. Throughout the rest of the newspaper it increasingly peddled the official Liberal line.

iii. The Burgeoning Democracy:

The apparent breakdown of civil cohesion in the years before the First World War forced the British Weekly to make concrete statements on labour policy. It maintained its view of Trade Unions as necessary arbitrators which should be encouraged towards a Liberal world view.

Industrial unrest had become critical in the latter

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[37] British Weekly, 6th June 1912.

[38] British Weekly, 24th August 1913.

[39] British Weekly, 1st May, 8th May, 15th May, and 22nd May 1913.

half of 1910. Disputes in the Great Northern Railway, S. Wales Collieries and the Lancashire Cotton Trade were among the most serious, and the Lockout following an unofficial strike of Northern Boilermakers underlined the difficulty of Trade Union compromises. The British Weekly accepted that such revolts arose out of a sense of grievance and hardship. However it held fast to the idea that negotiation and accommodation were possible and wanted to see the Trade Union movement seek industrial emancipation through political as well as strike action.[40] The British Weekly also noted how often it was staggered by the apparent triviality of industrial quarrels like those of the Welsh Colliery workers.[41] Of the Cotton dispute in Lancashire it remarked that outsiders could not understand why the "differences now separating the two parties should be allowed to dislocate the whole cotton industry of Lancashire".[42] The British Weekly used the unrest as a stick with which to beat the House of Lords. It ascribed the problem in part to the fact that working men looked to the resistance of many landowners working through the House of Lords:

> When the rich, already so rich and growing richer every day, adopt a policy closely approaching rebellion rather than pay their share, legally enforced, of their burden of the State, what wonder it is that the thoughts of the masses

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[40] British Weekly, 15th September 1910.

[41] British Weekly, 22nd September 1910.

[42] British Weekly, 29th September 1910.

should stray to anarchy.[43]

In August 1911 the British Weekly carried a letter from a "well known publicist" which remarked that contemporary newspapers had devoted comparatively little space to the strikes which had been taking place in many large centres of industry: "the truth is that we are in the midst of a great industrial upheaval, far more important than the abolition of the House of Lords..."[44] The Liberals had come no closer to creating a mechanism to arbitrate effectively in industrial disputes. In August the decision of Railway workers to abandon the Arbitration Treaty negotiated by the Board of Trade in 1907 brought criticism from the British Weekly and it refused to condemn the Government's employment of troops, arguing that those who opposed the use of force were "ill-informed sentimentalists".[45]

In September Nicoll delivered a speech to the Brotherhood Conference at Whitefield's Tabernacle. He urged the members to use their powers to the full and (significantly) chose to speak firstly of political power before moving to the importance of intellect and character:

> It has long been my conviction that the people of this country are not to be pitied. They are to be challenged...I shall not regret but rather rejoice in the hour when the masses of the nation take its administration in hand...it must be allowed that they understand infinitely better than the privileged what their life is and what

[43] British Weekly, 15th September 1910.

[44] British Weekly, 17th August 1911.

[45] British Weekly, 17th August 1911, 31st August 1911.

is needed to make that life wholesome and fair and human.[46]

In the same month the British Weekly called for the Church to become more involved in advocating practical demands like better pay. In a change of emphasis it suggested that people were tired of abstract argument and it was time for the Church to admit that in no trade should wages fall so low as to prevent the worker from living a human life.[47]

The question of a minimum wage became ever more pertinent in 1912 and the Liberals' oscillation on the point exacerbated the National Coal strike of that year. Riddell chronicled it "The biggest thing that has taken place for years - the beginning of an economic and industrial revolution".[48] The miners' strike began on the 1st March despite the Government's attempt to arbitrate, and because of the nation's dependency on the coal industry it was generally felt in the press that the Government had a responsibility to attempt to find a solution. In an article in the Daily Mail it was suggested that although the Government could not force miners to go down the pits it could ensure that the military handled the coal above ground. "Others argue that the coal owners have a right to do what they like with their own," the piece continued, "but we venture to think that the manufacturers and private

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[46] British Weekly, 28th September 1911.

[47] British Weekly, 21st September 1911.

[48] 2nd March, 1912, J.McEwen, (edit.), The Riddell Diaries 1908-1923, London 1986, p.34.

individuals who depend upon coal for their business and comfort will disagree. At such a moment, coal is no more private property than air".[49]

In February 1912 Lloyd George wrote Nicoll a long letter outlining his view of the subject:

> Rather than allow the whole of the industries of this country to be paralysed the Government ought to take strong action. They might even act on the analogy of the Court of Chancery when a dispute between partners threatens to stop a colliery. That court appoints a Receiver who controls and manages the mine for the partnership, rendering an account of the profits. You will realize that the one insuperable difficulty to carrying out a policy of this kind would be refusal of the miners to work on reasonable terms. You can coerce the owners by the process I have indicated, but you cannot compel a million of men to go down a pit and hew coal...The situation is critical and needs to be handled with great tact and firmness. The majority of the owners are prepared to be reasonable. South Wales and Scotland give most trouble.[50]

The British Weekly reproduced the unattributed view of the Chancellor. In a piece which underlined the importance of finding an alternative to coercion, the British Weekly listed among the possible options, "an analogy of the Court of Chancery" and a minimum wage with safeguards. The latter became the favoured choice of Nicoll's newspaper but Lloyd George's reading of the situation was otherwise

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[49] British Weekly, 29th February 1912.

[50] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 24th February 1912, Nicoll Papers, N. L.S., MS. 15941, ff.60-61.

faithfully transcribed.[51]

The British Weekly portrayed its repugnance of coercion - a blatant U turn - as in keeping with the principles of Liberalism. A week after the strike had begun it carried the view that the Government had done all in its powers to prevent the crisis and attacked the press for calling for heavy handed methods. "If the majority of the nation really wish measures of violence and coercion," the British Weekly challenged, "we are quite sure that Mr. Asquith and his Government will gladly lay their burden down and leave it to statesmen like Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne to compose the struggle. Come what may they [the Government] will not abandon the true principles of Liberalism".[52] Regarding this leader Denney argued against Nicoll's apparent endorsement of the Repeal of the Trades Disputes Act as in effect legalising all violence in strikes short of murder: "It simply suspends the law where there is a trade dispute,...Government by soldier is the worst government ever invented, but it is better than none,...But you may think I am turning Tory or timorous if I write like this, which I hope is not the case".[53]

Asquith's subsequent refusal to specify a figure - "5 and 2" - in the emergency Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act has

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[51] British Weekly, 29th February 1912.

[52] British Weekly, 7th March 1912.

[53] Denney to Nicoll, 11th March 1912, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.195-6.

also been portrayed as the product of Liberal principles.[54] But contemporary Liberals were critical of the nature of compromise contained in the Act. The Manchester Guardian berated the Government for failing to accept the "5 and 2" and thus stultifying their own Bill. The Liberal leaders had taken a very significant departure in legislating for a minimum wage but as the Manchester Guardian noted they had, "committed themselves to the principle of a statutory minimum wage for the sake of settling a great dispute without settling that dispute". The British Weekly was equally frustrated. It declared that no record had ever been read with greater disgust nor could any be more damaging to the Government. Disheartened it concluded, "All might so easily have been well, and all is ill".[55] A week before, Nicoll had written to Denney, "...I deeply regret that Asquith has not gone further to meet the miners. L.G. is on his back, which is a calamity for the nation at this time, for Asquith with all his merits is essentially a Balliol man, unimaginative and cold".[56]

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[54] Lloyd George's contention that, "Asquith's declaration for a minimum wage sounded the death knell of the Liberal party in its old form," (2nd March 1912, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.34) has helped to train the debate into a definition of what constitutes Liberalism. Indeed the Chancellor of the Exchequer claimed to be prepared to declare strike pay illegal and imprison leaders in the event that the miners did not accept the emergency Act. (19th March 1912, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.38) Actions much more Draconian than the imposition of the minimum wage.

[55] British Weekly, 28th March 1912.

[56] Nicoll to Denney, 22nd March 1912, in Darlow, op.cit., p.223. Denney responded on 25th March, "I am sorry to see you so severe on Asquith....To have put figures into the Bill would have been to admit that Parliament can fix wages, and that it ought to do so; but it can no more fix wages than it can fix the amount of sunshine there is to be next year." Letters of Denney to Nicoll, pp.196-7.

The first award under the Minimum Wages Act was given in May. The South Wales Miners received 4s 6.5d. The British Weekly shared the resulting exasperation and in its certainty that the Government had intended the 5 and 2 to be adopted repeated its regret that this had not been enacted: "We believe the country see more clearly that it will be cheapest in the end to grant the men all their reasonable demands,...It is no use saying that we can face another strike".[57] In private Nicoll admitted to Riddell that Lloyd George would have to face a minimum wage for the workers in the big trades: "It may be a temporary expedient and it may be objectionable, but it is the only real palliative in sight at the moment".[58] This encapsulated the British Weekly's position on industrial problems. It accepted the expediency of certain measures out of a desire to find accommodation for the Labour movement rather than through a vivid sense of social justice. The fact that Denney was a regular contributor to the British Weekly also told of its social conservatism. This was made more explicit during the campaign for the female franchise.

The British Weekly's apparent belief in the power of the masses did not extend to an endorsement of adult suffrage. In 1889 it had run a series "Should Women have the Vote" to which Nicoll contributed a piece. It was the editor's view that:

no system of government is sound that separates

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[57] British Weekly, 16th May 1912.

[58] 27th May 1912, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62970, f.123.

> legal authority and physical force; and female suffrage would do this. Representative government will simply go to pieces if the executive does not carry out the decree of the majority of male voters.[59]

Nicoll discounted the arguments of those who believed that women were not politically knowledgeable, that female enfranchisement would disrupt households or desexualize women. He argued that women should interest themselves in politics and exercise great influence, but contended "this influence will be best and most safely exercised away from the polling booth".[60]

In 1906 the British Weekly advocated leniency for imprisoned suffragettes; believing that they should be treated as first class misdemeanants rather than ordinary criminals.[61] However within two years it was condemning the militancy of the suffrage movement and calling for severe measures in response: "The present state of affairs is intolerable, and now that the Suffragettes have leagued themselves with the hooligan class, the police may reasonably ask for further powers".[62] In June Stoddart had attended a meeting of Suffragists in the Albert Hall and concluded that the movement was "largely an anti-Liberal and anti-Government movement" and that the extension of the vote to women on the present electoral basis "would be an undemocratic measure which might have the effect of placing

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[59] British Weekly, 6th December 1889.

[60] British Weekly, 6th December 1889.

[61] British Weekly, 1st November 1906.

[62] British Weekly, 15th October 1908.

the Conservatives in power for many years to come".[63]

Two years later Denney - a vehement anti-suffragist - wrote, "I see you are very non-committal about the Woman's Suffrage. This is one of the things on which I have a prejudice stronger than all reason..."[64] By 1911 he was feeling increasingly threatened:

> I am sorry you are going in for the woman's vote in politics. Manhood suffrage, on the basis of universal military training - a vote to every person of twenty-five who had put in his drills - is the panacea which commends itself to me. If we had any more demonstrations like Mrs P's last, I should say, 'Do not hesitate to shoot!' I admit this is a subject on which I can get few to agree with me...[65]

If Nicoll was prepared to accept a form of female suffrage he still linked the right to vote with physical aptitude. The acceleration of violence in 1912 did nothing to convince the British Weekly of the justice of women's suffrage, rather it was "unseemly and hateful to every class of the population. To choose the hour of a nation's great agony to damage the property of unoffending individuals was an act of great crassitude".[66] The concession the British Weekly made was to suggest that a referendum - odious but necessary - might solve the

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[63] British Weekly, 18th June 1908.

[64] Denney to Nicoll, 21st July 1910, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, pp.160-1.

[65] Denney to Nicoll, 25th November 1911, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, pp.186-7.

[66] British Weekly, 7th March 1912.

question on which both parties were divided.[67] However by 1913 the position of Nicoll's newspaper had not changed significantly since the 1880s. The British Weekly still insisted that adult suffrage was not possible because the country was not ready to have women make up the majority of the electorate.[68] This remained Nicoll's position until he accepted more sincerely the justice of female suffrage during the First World War.[69] In July 1915 the British Weekly praised women's contribution in the war and conceded, "That women will obtain the vote is as certain as the rising of the sun. But let the vote be a grateful and reverent offering, and not the angry concession to a fierce and irresistible demand".[70]

The British Weekly's Radicalism was largely unreconstructed. Even Jane Stoddart had internalised the anti-emancipation language of her newspaper and defined herself more in terms of party loyalty than gender. She represents an interesting example of those women who spoke the liberal discourse but did not challenge their own political lives.

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[67] British Weekly, 11th January 1912.

[68] British Weekly, 30th January 1913.

[69] Nicoll wrote to a correspondent on 11th June 1915, "Women have come out extremely well during this war. We have received a great number of patriotic letters whenever we have written an article. So I am much reconciled to the Suffrage. The women see the thing in its true danger." in Darlow, op.cit., p.245.

[70] British Weekly, 22nd July 1915.

iv. The Third Home Rule Bill:

The threat of civic collapse also clung to the debate over the future of Ireland. Protestants in Ulster were threatening armed rebellion before the Third Home Rule Bill had been introduced. The British Weekly had no truck with the extremists. It was concerned that legislation would contain securities for religious liberty but was convinced by the fact that in the last General Election Ulster had voted by 42,991 to 41,693 in favour of Home Rule and therefore it was the Government's responsibility to call Carson's bluff.[71] Once the contents of the Bill had been revealed the British Weekly declared them watertight, "a model of constructive statesmanship". It noted that even in the Conservative party there was a manifest shrinking from identification with the Orangemen: "This is not the day for the rekindling of religious passion. It is not the day for the threat of organised rebellion".[72]

The overwhelming democratic support in Ireland for Home Rule made it possible for the British Weekly to support the Catholic majority against militant Protestant opponents. On the Bill's Second Reading it considered that the opposition of certain parts of Ulster was no doubt real but that it was "not enough to warrant the refusal to the vast majority of the Irish people all their claim to self-government".[73] The British Weekly also held the view that the Orangemen represented a minority view of Protestant

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[71] British Weekly, 11th January 1912.

[72] British Weekly, 18th April 1912.

[73] British Weekly, 16th May 1912.

Ulster. In June the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland refused to pass a report containing an emphatic pronouncement on Home Rule, convincing the British Weekly "that the Irish Presbyterians by a great majority detest the threats of civil war which have been so freely used by their unwise champions in Parliament".[74]

The devices used by the Carsonites were also repellent. The British Weekly defended its position - despite involvement in the passive resistance campaign - by drawing a line between passive protest and talk of armed rebellion and civil war.[75] When a draft of the Solemn League and Covenant had been laid down the British Weekly wondered at what Orangemen hoped to gain by this type of agitation. Even if they succeeded in turning out the Liberals, a Unionist Government would not be able to impose the will of the minority on the Irish nation:

> The Home Rule legions cannot now be thrown back, and those who meddle with anarchy will find that they have set loose forces the strength of which they never understood...we do not believe that in the end of the day sober men will range themselves with Sir Edward Carson.[76]

The duty of the Government was therefore plain: it

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[74] British Weekly, 13th June 1912. In the autumn Denney added a further dimension to the debate when he wrote to Nicoll, "There is a curious likeness between the Home Rule (sic) and the Church Union situation. It looks as if Ulster might defeat the one, and if a resolute group of voluntaries might defeat the other." 25th October 1912, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.209.

[75] British Weekly, 11th July 1912.

[76] British Weekly, 12th September 1912.

must not yield to threats.[77] The British Weekly predicted that Orangemen would have no support in the Dominions or America and in Britain it had become clear that the country was not to be roused on their behalf. The British people "desired that the long quarrel between themselves and Ireland should end".[78] D.C. Lathbury[79] also wrote two leaders for the British Weekly which put forward his case as an anti-Home Ruler who now conceded that the spectacle of a Dublin Parliament could "hardly be so painful as the constant recourse to fresh expedients for enforcing law upon a people extraordinarily clever in devising ways of resisting it".[80]

The British Weekly had never conceded that the fears of the Protestants in Ireland - although understandable - were justifiable. It accepted the Nationalists' assurances that the Bill would be "so drawn as to make anything in the nature of religious persecution absolutely impossible". Effectively the British Weekly supported a system of Home Rule within Home Rule without understanding the long term complications of this for Nationalists. It accepted as its basis for this the fact that Nationalists had again and again said they would yield to Protestant Ulster on all

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[77] British Weekly, 3rd October 1912.

[78] British Weekly, 12th September 1912, 23rd January 1913.

[79] Formerly of the ecclesiastical journal the Pilot.

[80] British Weekly, 8th August 1912. The second leader appeared on 5th September 1912.

that could be yielded.[81] Furthermore, once Carson began to talk of a separate Ulster, the British Weekly was riled by the inconsistency of a movement which had begun by talking of marching from Belfast to Cork to protect Protestant minorities against the great tyrannies of the Church of Rome and then withdrew this protection from those areas which needed it most.[82]

Throughout, the British Weekly was looking to hold the centre ground; hoping for a consensus which would bring about a solution, removing Ireland from the political equation. The threatened violence of the Ulster Protestants made it much easier for a British Nonconformist newspaper to justify its support for Catholics. The allegiance of Orangemen appeared to be up for auction. It was reported that on the occasion of the grand review of the provisional forces of the provisional government of Ulster a central banner on the Donegal Road read, "Long Live the Empire of Germany. No King in England". In an interview in the Morning Post, Craig testified that there was "a spirit abroad,...that Germany and the German Empire would be preferred to the rule of John Redmond, Patrick Ford, and the Molly Maguires". The British Weekly reported the event in the belief that the British public "should attentively ponder the facts".[83] Ultimately the British Weekly took this view:

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[81] British Weekly, 18th September 1913, 25th September 1913.

[82] British Weekly, 2nd October 1913.

[83] British Weekly, 2nd October 1913.

> We have characterised the policy of civil war in Ulster as Satanic madness, and to this characterisation we still hold. But there was a day in America when Abraham Lincoln had to choose civil war before any possible alternatives, and there is no one now who doubts that he was right.[84]

Despite all public bravado in his newspaper - which was no doubt genuine - Nicoll came to extend his hope that the Northern Protestants could be made to feel secure into support for giving them the right to take a second ballot after six years which would extend their separation for a further six years. When Riddell conveyed this change of approach to Lloyd George and T.P. O'Connor they "both seemed surprised and strongly expressed the hope that N. would not propound the plan in the 'British Weekly.'" When this concern was relayed to Nicoll he replied that he proposed to make the suggestion "in a guarded way".[85] Denney believed the Government should face down both the Lords and Ulster if necessary: "If they simply cave in to the tempest of bad passions that has disgraced Christianity in the north of Ireland for two years past, they will never be forgiven".[86]

It is striking that the British Weekly overcame any affinity with the Ulster Protestants despite that fact that their Covenant was imbued with the language of the Bible

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[84] British Weekly, 30th October 1913.

[85] 15th March 1914, Riddell Diaries, B.L. Add MS.62974, f.58.

[86] Denney to Nicoll, 25th July 1914, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, pp.241-2.

and Presbyterian fundamentalism, beginning: "Being convinced in our consciences".[87] The British Weekly's position revealed its determination to be loyal to the Government and to be done with the Irish.

v. The Defence of the Realm:

Ireland appeared to represent the most immediate threat to British security but it was in foreign affairs that the real menace would explode. The naval race between Britain and Germany caused domestic as well as international tension. Fear of invasion was played out in the annual Naval Estimates. The British Weekly was a supporter of strengthening Britain's power over the seas but as ever was concerned about the cost. Throughout it had to reconcile its demand for lower rates with the instinct that spending on social reforms and the navy could not be reduced. In March 1889 it expressed concern that both the Conservative and Liberal parties had programmes which would increasingly cost the taxpayer:

> The new County Councils will add to the rates, the Education rate is to be added to, money is to be spent on the Navy, it is proposed that we should put our hands in our pockets for the volunteers. [This is] all very well, but the British taxpayer has only limited means, and he will begin to ask whether he may not use national property not at present in possession of the nation, but enjoyed by a privileged fragment

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[87] E.Longley, "The Rising, the Somme and Irish Memory," in M.Ni Dhonnchadha and T.Dorgan (edits.), Revising the Rising, Derry 1991, p.38.

thereof.[88]

Fear of ballooning expenditure meant that the British Weekly initially attempted to police warmongering and arms races. In January 1902 Count Von Bulow's speech in the Reichstag criticising British involvement in the Boer War caused a furore in the British press. Chamberlain responded with a speech in Birmingham which the British Weekly accepted, "represented the nation - and the truth". But it was severely critical of the flamboyance of Chamberlain's speech noting that people could look back on "the terrible record of unfinished war," and, "look forward to the load of debt and hatred which it has cost them". It concluded with a sentiment which was characteristic of the British Weekly up to the First World War:

> We wish we were as sure that our Navy is as strong as the language of Mr. Chamberlain. If it were, there would be no need for apprehension, and none for recrimination...A plain and dignified statement of the real facts would have done good; but the heady interchanges of retort and counter-retort between prominent statesmen is greatly to be deprecated.[89]

Lloyd George's position on naval spending was always equivocal. Esher wrote of him in February 1909, "Ll.G. in his heart does not care a bit for economy, and is quite ready to face Parliament with any amount of deficit, and "go" for a big navy. He is...an Imperialist at heart, if he

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[88]British Weekly, 1st March 1889.

[89] British Weekly, 16th January 1902.

is anything..."[90] During the height of the 1909 naval panic, the British Weekly (although declaring erroneously that there had been no quarrel between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor) assured its readership that Lloyd George was no advocate of a little navy and indeed that he would be the last man to betray his country.[91] John Grigg confirms this view, noting that, "Lloyd George had always believed in a strong Navy and even as Chancellor could be persuaded that higher spending on it was vital for the nation's security".[92]

The British Weekly along with the rest of the country, anticipated an increase in the 1909 Naval Estimates.[93] Three days after the Estimates had been announced the Prime Minister revealed to the Commons that he had been mistaken in believing that the German naval programme was incapable of being realised within the dates assigned and that by 1911 Germany would have 13 Dreadnoughts afloat. It had previously been suggested that she could only possibly have nine by this date.[94] The ensuing panic caused the Observer to suggest that the British fleet act at once to destroy the German navy. The British Weekly had no time for such scaremongering and indeed was convinced that it was the result of an attempt to undermine the Liberal Government in a bid to frustrate the Budget proposals

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[90] Morris, Edwardian Radicalism, p.140.

[91] British Weekly, 25th march 1909.

[92] Grigg, Peace to War, p.176.

[93] British Weekly, 25th February 1909.

[94] British Weekly, 18th March 1909.

(which had not yet been revealed).[95] The British Weekly attempted to place the naval controversy within the political context and suggested that Balfour encouraged panic because he was unsure of the strength of the protection platform and hoped to unite opposition to both Liberals and Socialists. The British Weekly was concerned lest the Government would assist the Unionists by lacking a sense of urgency in its handling of the naval scare. It wanted the Government to take out a naval loan in the event of the rejection of the Budget by the Lords, "We are convinced that they must allow no suspicion to rest on their ability and willingness to keep up the Navy..." the British Weekly declared, "and assure the safety and stability of the country".[96]

Radicals refused to accept that the tally of naval strength should only include Dreadnoughts and discount all other battleships and cruisers. In contrast the British Weekly believed that the need of the nation was summed up in one word, "Dreadnoughts".[97] In April 1909 Churchill made a speech in Dundee which urged the nation to stop judging the strength of the navy in this way. The British Weekly dismissed this view as Britain's first line of defence was the Dreadnought. It argued that a margin of three was not sufficient.[98]

At the end of March the British Weekly suggested that

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[95] British Weekly, 25th March 1909.

[96] British weekly, 6th April 1909.

[97] British Weekly, 25th March 1909.

[98] British Weekly, 22nd April 1909.

a delay in commissioning the second four Dreadnoughts provided an atmosphere for a friendly arrangement with Germany. Conversely the newspaper also conceded that by building eight Dreadnoughts the Government would allay the fears of the nation and prove to other countries that she was serious about maintaining her supremacy. The British Weekly concluded by admitting that it did not know which was the more desirable approach.[99] By the 15th April it also claimed that there was not the smallest doubt that the Government would build eight rather than four Dreadnoughts it should state this clearly and stop playing into the Opposition's hands.[100]

"Iniquitous and insane as the vast expenditure so spent must appear to all sober-minded people, the facts have to be faced", the British Weekly assured its readership. The "facts" as they appeared portrayed the British Fleet as a vehicle for peace. Citing the United States' conflict with Spain, Fashoda and the South African war as instances when the threat of the British navy diffused the possibility of interference from other continental powers, the British Weekly argued that in the previous twelve years peace had been secured without the fleet firing a single shot.[101] Peace was equated, not only with intimidation, but with British interests. Indeed the

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[99] British Weekly, 25th March 1909.

[100] British Weekly, 15th April 1909.

[101] British Weekly. 7th April, 1909.

British Weekly claimed that the term Dreadnought was in itself "a stroke of genius on the part of those responsible for naval nomenclature, representing as it does in one word the idea of defence, not defiance".[102]

This represented to the British Weekly a position of sober imperialism: one which simultaneously condemned inflammatory talk while taking on board the alarms scaremongerers raised. Nicoll was therefore a much more pliable ally when Lloyd George delivered his Mansion House speech in July 1911. It is well recorded that Lloyd George pre-empted criticism from C.P. Scott by asking him not to write anything "about the German business" until the two had talked.[103] The shift in Lloyd George's approach to Germany made it necessary for him to provide some explanation to his Radical constituency. It can be reasonably assumed that the Chancellor met with Nicoll in an attempt to keep him onside. This can be further inferred from the fact that the British Weekly did not include any reference to the Mansion House speech in the next issue. On 3rd August however it noted:

> A fortnight ago, at the Banker's dinner, Mr. Lloyd George startled his countrymen by using language of solemn warning, which could only

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[102] British Weekly, 15th April 1909.

[103] Scott was unaware of the content of Lloyd George's speech but he was assured: "This is *urgently* requested as a personal matter. The Chancellor asks if you could come up to breakfast with him tomorrow at 9.15. He regrets very much having to suggest your returning to town, but he and the Master of Elibank feel it of the utmost importance that nothing should be written without your seeing him." R.H.Gretton (of the Manchester Guardian's London staff) to C.P.Scott, n.d. [21st July 1911], T.Wilson, (edit.) The Political Diaries of C.P.Scott 1911-1928, London 1970, p.45.

> have been meant for Germany. It was universally realized that one of the most peace-loving modern statesmen could not have spoken such words unless he had recognised that the claims of Germany might involve a menace to the peace of Europe. Behind the curtains some strange drama is proceeding.[104]

However Lloyd George was not to be given *carte blanche* and at the end of August the British Weekly carried a piece by "a well-known naval expert" which asserted that many did not share the views of the Chancellor "as to the increased danger to [British] trade routes caused by the presence of the German cruisers at Agadir".[105]

The British Weekly attempted to maintain a selective approach to the increasing tension with Germany. In February 1912 Churchill circulated a memorandum to Cabinet which argued that the new German Navy Law allowed for an increase in the navy which should make Britain take serious note.[106] The following day he spoke in Glasgow on the need to maintain British naval supremacy. The speech had displeased Lloyd George who believed it, "most imprudent and calculated to ruin Haldane's mission to Germany, which was on a fair way to success".[107] The British Weekly described the speech as "a screaming, bellicose, jingo deliverance, calculated to irritate Germany in the highest degree". The most objectionable part of the speech, in the

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[104] British Weekly, 3rd August 1911.

[105] British Weekly, 31st August 1911.

[106] Cabinet Memorandum circulated by Churchill, 14 February 1912, Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O. C/24/3/17.

[107] Lloyd George to Churchill, 10th February 1912, recorded in McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.32.

newspaper's opinion, was Churchill's contention that while the British fleet was a necessity Germany's was a luxury. In a change of tack from its stand three years earlier the British Weekly described as "notoriously untrue" Churchill's declaration that the British navy could not "menace the peace of a single Continental hamlet".[108]

Disagreement with Churchill's provocative language did not stop the British Weekly from giving reluctant support to the First Lord's high Naval Estimates of March 1912 which attempted to build a 60% margin of superiority into the British Fleet. Although the British Weekly did not think this an unreasonable target it did express profound regret that such large sums should be diverted from the needs of the people".[109] Indeed Churchill was aware that he could not rely on unqualified support from the public or the Cabinet. In April 1913 he suggested that the Dominions should supply an Imperial squadron of battle cruisers, and called for a Naval holiday in Britain and Germany.[110] The proposal was repeated in October when it was suggested that Germany postpone laying down its annual two ships for a year and Britain would delay laying down its four. In January the following year Lloyd George spoke of the need to abate the ever growing expenditure on arms and called for cooperation among nations. The British Weekly was at one with Lloyd George in his assertion that British superiority should be maintained but not so feverishly

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[108] British Weekly, 15th February 1912.

[109] British Weekly, 21st March 1912.

[110] British Weekly, 3rd April 1913.

increased. It concluded:

> There are many of us who do not like Mr. Winston Churchill's talks through the megaphone. They would prefer a quiet and secure and unboastful efficiency. But every man must be allowed his own manner, and in all Mr. Churchill's actions at least he is backed by a Cabinet we can trust.[111]

The British Weekly's response to the Naval race reflected the confusion in the country. If officials could not agree it was impossible for amateurs to gauge the danger properly. Typically the British Weekly fell somewhere between the pacifist and the bellicose camps, as in the Boer war; falling closer to the latter than the former.

However debates over naval strength revealed that the British Weekly was susceptible to the fear of invasion and this contextualises both its support for social reform (national efficiency) and the extension of the nation's tax base in the People's Budget and the Land Campaign.

vi. The Land Campaign:

The battle over the Naval Estimates was played out against the background of domestic politics. Lloyd George's initial silence over Churchill's 1914 Estimates was an attempt to gain support for the Land Campaign. He told Riddell, "I have made a bargain with Winston - he has agreed to support my land policy with which he is not in sympathy and I have agreed to give him more money for the

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[111] British Weekly, 8th January 1914.

Navy...I am only endeavouring to carry out my scheme of social reform...I am not at all sure that the bargain will meet with the approval of some members of our party..."[112]

Balfour calculated that Lloyd George's later public opposition to Churchill was the result of purely political motives:

> I do not mean that as Chancellor of the Exchequer and a taxpayer, he is not seriously alarmed at the growth of expenditure. I have no doubt he is...What I do suppose is that he wants an election cry which will rally what remains of the old Radical Nonconformist Party, the new semi-Socialist-Radical, and the Labour party. A campaign against armaments is admirably suited for the purpose".[113]

Lloyd George had been trying to rally the old Nonconformist radicals with proposals for comprehensive land reform. The Land Campaign was a concerted attack in an area which had been a long standing grievance of Lloyd George and represented a natural progression in Liberal reforms but it was fragmented and difficult to sell to the public. The Campaign - which was anticipated throughout 1912 and officially launched in October 1913 - provided veteran Liberal supporters with a focus which combined the language of social justice with economic pragmatism. In May 1912 Lloyd George told Riddell:

> I am convinced that the land question is the real issue. You must break down the remnants of the feudal system. I have a scheme. I propose

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[112] 1st November 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62973, in B.B.Gilbert, David Lloyd George A Political Life: the organiser of victory, 1912-16, London 1992, p.70.

[113] Balfour to Selbourne, 7th January 1914, in Gilbert, Lloyd George, 1912-1916, p.74.

> that a land court should be established to fix fair rents and tenures...
> ...there are times when Radicalism needs a great stimulus - when the Radical cause has fallen into the abyss of respectability and conventionality. Something must be done to put fresh life into the dry bones. I feel that the land and the agricultural labourer are at the root of the whole social evil.[114]

The following month Lloyd George breakfasted with a group of Radicals which included Rowntree, Scott, Buxton and Masterman. The unofficial Enquiry Committee which aimed to look at urban and rural conditions developed at this meeting. On 19th June the Chancellor had Nicoll, Riddell and Masterman to dinner and outlined his policy which included breaking down "the relics of feudalism," creating land courts to fix fair rents and tribunals to fix agricultural wages in certain districts.[115] In October Asquith made public his support for a re-evaluation of the ownership of land; in part a bid to quell rumours of a split in Cabinet. The Prime Minister was also anxious to set the boundaries of reform. Despite pinpointing the land question as at the root of the evils of national life, Asquith declared that the Government's solution would "not impair the stability of property, and...[would] not confiscate the rights or the interests of any individual or class..."[116] But the meeting arranged as a platform for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's launch of the Land Campaign

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[114] Lloyd George to Riddell, 27th May 1912, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.43.

[115] 19th June 1912, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62970, ff.145-8.

[116] British Weekly, 10th October 1912.

was officially postponed from the 26th October 1912 as a result of the situation in the Near East[117] and in order to build up support in Cabinet.

The British Weekly saw in the Land Campaign a way to rejuvenate the party and from the outset had portrayed the advocacy of the land scheme as the beginning of a new order. In December 1912 it described Lloyd George's speech in Aberdeen as containing, "the note of the new era". "Mr. Lloyd George spoke as one whose heart was set on the solution of the social problems by which we are confronted," the piece continued, "and which we can no longer ignore...There must be a new order. Mr. Lloyd George has a vision of the new order in the new day, and it is this which gives him his power".[118] Lloyd George responded, "Robertson Nicoll is the greatest living journalist from a polemical standpoint. It is a pity he is too old to edit a daily paper. He would make it an enormous power".[119]

The Land Campaign was dealt a serious blow by the Marconi affair and Nicoll's value to Lloyd George became even more pronounced. The Chancellor's involvement in the purchase of U.S. Marconi stock had the lateral effect of exposing his movement from the democracy to the

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[117] British Weekly, 17th October 1912.

[118] British Weekly, 5th December 1912.

[119] Lloyd George to Riddell, 29th December 1912, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.52.

plutocracy.[120] Northcliffe commented that the whole business would "draw LG's teeth. He cannot attack the rich as he has done in the past".[121] Lloyd George was ever concerned lest he alienate his natural constituency and therefore courted Nicoll who again acted as the Chancellor's apologist. Lloyd George, "was anxious to know Robertson Nicoll's views" concerning Marconi. Riddell assured him that the editor was very favourable, "which seemed to please L.G".[122] The British Weekly throughout championed Lloyd George's innocence and Nicoll was apparently "all for L.G. and Rufus Isaacs". He even asked Riddell to prepare some notes for his British Weekly leader on the Marconi case, "dealing with the legal position of the 2 companies".[123]

At the end of March Nicoll dined with Riddell, Lloyd George, Rufus Isaacs and Masterman. Riddell recorded:

> We spoke much of the Marconi case...Both L.G. and R.I. spoke very bitterly of their critics. It was curious to observe that none of my guests showed any appreciation of the view that was taken by the general public, viz, that such dealings were indiscreet and unsuitable for members of the Government. The party fight enters so strongly into their minds that all other considerations are overshadowed. L.G. and R.I. were very attentive to Nicoll and evidently very anxious regarding the line he would take in

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[120] B.B.Gilbert, "David LLoyd George and the Great Marconi Scandal," Historical Research, Vol.LXII, No.149, October 1989, p.317.

[121] 1st May 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62972, in Gilbert, "Marconi Scandal," p.317.

[122] 20th March 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS.62972, ff.60-61.

[123] 26th March 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62972, f.83.

the "B.W." on Wednesday.[124]

The British Weekly accepted Lloyd George's official defence that he had made a modest provision for a rainy day recognising the transitory nature of political office; the explanation was "so simple, so frank, so human, [that it] blew the whole fabric of scandal into the air". It condemned the whole "discreditable and sickening" business as an attack on Lloyd George who had to bear the penalty of being a great and victorious reformer.[125] Lloyd George wrote that he was deeply indebted to Nicoll for this powerful article, of which he was having a marked copy sent to every Member of Parliament. He added, "Your paper is read by those who form opinions on our side & that is why the article is so useful at this juncture".[126]

The Marconi controversy diverted much of Lloyd George's time and energy away from the Land campaign. Riddell warned him that the Marconi business would knock the party endwise if they were not careful. He suggested that what Lloyd George's people wanted were "some good tonicy articles in the press and suggested he should write to Robertson Nicoll which he said he would do..."[127] Nicoll appears to have been particularly concerned that he should

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[124] 30th March 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62972, ff.92-93.

[125] British Weekly, 3rd April 1913.

[126] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 3rd April 1913, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.65-66.

[127] 7th and 8th June 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62972, f.212.

reproduce the official Lloyd George line during the whole Marconi episode. In June Riddell recorded: "He [Nicoll] asked me to prepare an article for him on the Marconi debate which commenced today. I promised to see L.G. and Rufus & get some points from them".[128]

The Land Campaign was not only hindered by Marconi. It proved extremely difficult to give practical detail to Lloyd George's reforming rhetoric. The Government's poor showing in the by-elections in the summer made more urgent the need for a comprehensive policy. Defeats at Newmarket and Altrincham prompted the Solicitor General to declare in a speech in Oxford that the Liberals would reply with an advance in the Land Campaign. The British Weekly supported the announcement but wanted to see a proper declaration before it was anticipated in October. Again, the following month in the report of Lloyd George's speech at the National Liberal Club in the wake of the Marconi affair, the British Weekly stated plainly that, "What the people are hungering for is a bold and articulated land policy", and hoped that this would not be delayed until the Autumn.[129] Having received a good reception at the National Liberal Club, Lloyd George was ready to put Marconi behind him and told Riddell:

> I must get on with my Land Campaign. I shall give them hell. I think it will be well devised to meet the grievances, the terrible grievances which undoubtedly exist. Fix up that dinner with

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[128] 19th June 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62972, f.236.

[129] British Weekly, 6th June 1913, 3rd July 1913.

Robertson Nicoll so that we may have a good talk.[130]

Riddell had urged Lloyd George to issue a shilling book on the Land Campaign and the two were to meet with Nicoll to discuss it.[131] At the beginning of July Lloyd George, Riddell, Masterman and Nicoll had dinner and considered the best method of presenting the Land Commission. It was agreed that ideally two books would be published: one at 5/- containing the report and evidence and the other at 1/- containing a summary and statement of cause. No doubt Nicoll was recalling the problems with the Insurance Bill when he strongly urged that the facts must be "absolutely accurate". Lloyd George stressed his determination to keep the Cabinet with him: "I shall not make the mistake wh Joe (Chamberlain) made of stating my scheme to the country before stating it to my colleagues. Had he acted otherwise, he might have avoided such opposition".[132]

Lloyd George used the occasion of a garden party at Dulwich to criticise the Land Purchase scheme which had been put forward by Lord Lansdowne as a possible solution to the accepted land problem. The British Weekly could not so easily dismiss the Unionist's proposals. John Grigg has pointed to Lloyd George's evasion of the fact that the

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[130] 6th July 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62973, f.6.

[131] 26th June 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62972, ff.246-7.

[132] 9th July 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62973, ff.8-10.

landowners were themselves prepared to seek reform as a central weakness of the Chancellor's polemics during the Land Campaign.[133] In contrast the British Weekly feared that the Unionists would outflank Liberals by offering more comprehensive reform than the Government. "Rather than forfeit the labourers' vote [Unionists] will offer much more," it warned, "and we shall not be at all surprised if they formulate a scheme for a minimum wage". The British Weekly accepted that the Government was on firm ground when it attacked the riches of the landed class but feared that this in itself was not enough. It urged the Government to announce the details of its own land scheme along with support for a minimum wage.[134] The British Weekly, although it claimed that it had long been an advocate of the minimum wage,[135] was more emphatic about the political than the social advantages.

From 21st August until 11th September George Riddell (as "X") contributed a series of articles to the British Weekly under the heading "The New Campaign". In October Riddell wrote: "Dined with Robertson Nicoll who kindly complimented me on my 4 recent articles in the "British Weekly" on the land campaign. He asked me to continue to help him as the campaign developed which I agreed to do".[136] The articles dealt with issues such as minimum wages for

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[133] Grigg, Peace to War, p.96.

[134] British Weekly, 10th July 1913.

[135] British Weekly, 27th November 1913.

[136] 8th October 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62973, f.48.

agricultural workers, rating anomalies, land courts and rural housing. This laid some foundation for the Land Campaign which was officially launched by the Chancellor of the Exchequer with two speeches to predominantly Liberal crowds at Bedford on 11th October 1913.

The British Weekly informed its readers that Lloyd George had addressed "perfervid audiences" which exhibited unparalleled enthusiasm.[137] In contrast the Times reported that, "Disappointment was undoubtedly the feeling of many, even of the selected Liberal delegates, who were present". Worse still was the account sent to Walter Runciman, Minister for Agriculture, which recorded that during Lloyd George's long speech, "the audience was almost bored; there was applause certainly but never very hearty,...There was no wild enthusiasm".[138]

It is therefore not surprising that George Riddell wrote to Nicoll (at the Chancellor's bidding) conveying Lloyd George's view that the British Weekly leader was the only one in which the true inwardness of the situation had been indicated and that it had been the best written of the speech.[139] It is also not surprising as Riddell wrote the leader.[140] He outlined briefly the Chancellor's proposals to deal with:

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[137] British Weekly, 16th October 1913.

[138] Times, 13 October 1913, Arthur Gage to Walter Runciman, 12 October 1913, Runciman Papers, in Grigg, Peace to War, pp.94-95.

[139] Riddell to Nicoll, 17th October 1913, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.66-67.

[140] Riddell to Nicoll, 27th October 1913, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S. MS.15941, ff.68-69.

> (1) The wages of the agricultural labourer; (2) The relations between landlord and tenant; (3) Housing; (4) The holding up of land required for the adequate development of a district; (5) The anomalies of the rating system; (6) The improvement of land not now under cultivation; and (7) The revision of the railway rates as affecting the conveyance of agricultural produce.

One of the problems faced by the Land Campaign in its initial stages was the fact that the Government had not come to a comprehensive statement of policy. Riddell was somewhat hampered when it came to filling in the details of Lloyd George's Bedford speech and reduced it to the words: "His Majesty's Government beg to announce that they have determined to abolish the system of absolute and unfettered ownership of land".[141]

Nicoll was kept informed of the Land Campaign throughout October. On the 17th he was informed by Riddell that Lloyd George's forthcoming speech at Swindon would explain in detail the plan which had been determined upon by the Cabinet the previous day. It was suggested that Nicoll might like to mention this in the next issue of the British Weekly.[142] On the 27th October Riddell wrote to Nicoll to say that all topics had been dealt with exhaustively in the British Weekly with the exception of

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[141] British Weekly, 16th October 1913.

[142] Riddell to Nicoll, 17th October 1913, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.66-67. The British Weekly duly carried the information: "We believe - though we write in ignorance of Mr. Lloyd George's Wednesday speeches [due to be made in Swindon] - that the plans for ushering in the new conditions have been definitely settled by the Cabinet, and that the suggestions of the Land report will be carried in the main." British Weekly 23th October 1913.

the system of settled estates.[143] Three days later the newspaper carried a note on the subject which had been "ignored in the press".[144]

By the end of October the British Weekly could announce that the Government had decided to set up a Ministry of Land which would possess judicial powers and would control the relationship between landlord and tenant.[145] The campaign limped along, supported by the British Weekly until February 1914 when the Chancellor was able to announce that the Government would use the system of rating site values. This announcement marked the point at which the Land Campaign was subsumed into the struggle over the 1914 Budget.[146]

Editorially the British Weekly had never been a vehicle for original economic thought. However the extent to which it accepted the official line of the Land Campaign showed a marked difference. Lloyd George through Riddell fed the British Weekly his official line which was relayed without much amendment to its readership.

The chronic lack of preparation in Lloyd George's last peace-time Budget once again left him open to criticism that his Finance and Revenue packages were littered with inconsistencies. Despite this and the lack-lustre way in which the Chancellor introduced his scantily considered

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[143] Riddell to Nicoll, 27th October 1913, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff.68-69.

[144] British Weekly, 30th October 1913.

[145] British Weekly, 30th October 1913.

[146] Grigg, Peace to War, p.100.

proposals, the British Weekly rallied to Lloyd George's side. It announced that the most effective evangelists of Socialism were luxurious motorcars: "they proclaim to the toiling multitudes the luxurious lives of the rich". This picked up the thread of Lloyd George's warning that the murmurs of insurrection were to be heard not just in Ulster but among millions of men in Britain who would revolt against their conditions unless those who led rich, opulent lives were prepared to make sacrifices to lift their fellow citizens out of their wretchedness.[147] But the catalyst to social upheaval was to come from elsewhere.

vii. Conclusion:

Increasingly the British Weekly shared its long standing characteristics of the pulpit with those of the stump. The editor's disillusionment with the Liberal party was not conveyed through the pages of his newspaper. Warnings were given that the history of the party should not be one of single issue obstructionism but as before the British Weekly had no other realistic political home. Nicoll remained a very conventional Free Churchman and while the Conservatives had too long been the enemy, the Labour party did not appeal because it did not have the moral correctiveness of middle class Liberalism.

Nicoll's social Radicalism was always of a practical political rather than emotional type. He accepted the minimum wage as expedient and even came to accept a limited form of female suffrage although he was instinctively

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[147] British Weekly, 14th May 1914.

opposed to it. The People's Budget had shown how effectively and efficiently the British Weekly was capable of bringing the Government's message to the middle class. In the years which followed its line was more and more directed by official Liberal policy.

The campaign to promote the Insurance Bill of 1911 revealed how Nicoll - who had always seen the role of a newspaper as that of educator as well as entertainer - used his skills to propagandise for the Liberal party, having dropped the codicil that it would help the political cause of the Free Churches. The position of the British Weekly was even more prominent in the Land Campaign which followed. By this point Nicoll had become so far ensconced in the Lloyd George orbit that he had no criticism of the M.P. despite revelations of impropriety during the Marconi affair. In fact Nicoll had been compromised to such a degree that George Riddell did not differentiate between the editor, Lloyd George, Rufus Isaacs and Masterman when he observed of his guests, the "party fight enters so strongly into their minds that all other considerations are overshadowed".[148]

The British Weekly was still working hard to strengthen Christianity in Britain and three quarters of the newspaper continued to address religious issues. But the content of its political material had changed considerably. Nicoll's tolerance of the Catholic majority in Ireland also told of a change. In 1886 the British

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[148] 26th March 1913, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add.MS. 62972, f.83.

Weekly had supported Home Rule out of a sense of loyalty to a Liberal party which provided a political vehicle for Free Churches. It then denounced the Irish alliance once it appeared as a long term obstacle to domestic reform. By 1912 the British Weekly had moved full circle and was used as an advocate of official Liberal policy with no implicit promise of reward for Nonconformists. The outbreak of the First World War would put new pressures on the relationship between Nicoll and Lloyd George. It was a period when the editor's Nonconformity, Liberalism and patriotism were in heightened relief and were not always reconcilable.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The First World War created specific problems for Christian leaders. In order to abate the pacifist tendency in Church groups, leaders were called upon to justify the nation's cause and rally their flocks behind the Government. However the subsequent horror of the conflict appeared to fly in the face of the very existence of God and ministers were then confronted with the task of proving that Christianity still had meaning amid the bloodshed and uncertainty. Nicoll accepted the importance of his role as a prominent Free Churchman and threw his weight behind the Government; but as an editor he had to combine this loyalty with a responsibility to ask questions about the State's handling of the war. This chapter examines the issues which were most important to Nicoll from 1914 to 1918. Therefore it gives more time to the Welsh Disestablishment Bill of 1915 and the battle over State Purchase of the drink traffic than to the ideological battles of party politics between Asquith and Lloyd George or the introduction of War Socialism.

i. A Just War:

At the end of July 1914 the British Weekly in line with other Liberal newspapers - led by the Manchester Guardian and the Daily News - urged a policy of neutrality

in the face of the apparent demand for war in the Northcliffe press[1]:

> No one understands better than Sir Edward Grey that under hardly any conceivable circumstances would public opinion allow this country to be dragged into an Austro-Servian war. The quarrel in no way concerns us and we are fortunately unbound by any engagements that would require us to intervene.[2]

His newspaper's position won for Nicoll the support of Ramsay MacDonald who complained of Grey's "diabolical and wicked speech" in the House on the 3rd August. "Up to last Thursday he [Grey] stood magnificent for peace," MacDonald wrote, "and then suddenly he seemed to lose his nerve and his temper and swung round, outdoing Churchill in his demands that the Cabinet should agree to war".[3] On 29th July Nicoll had warned George Riddell of his intention to get the Free Churches to prepare a Memorial to the Government against intervention and supporting Russia. Within a week Riddell had another meeting with Nicoll in an attempt to explain "fully" the situation. Riddell recorded:

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[1] In fact the Westminster Gazette was the only Liberal newspaper not to promote a policy of non-intervention. M. & E.Brock, (edits.) H.H.Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley, Oxford 1985, p.142.

[2] British Weekly, 30th July 1914.

[3] MacDonald to Nicoll, 4th August 1914, in Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.128. Koss has written that MacDonald offered his support to a leading article which appeared on 31st July 1914. The piece, which was not a leader, appeared on the 30th July 1914.

> Before I left he [Nicoll] told me that he thought that we had no alternative but to support France, and that we must all stand together and sink differences of opinion. I wrote a note to Masterman saying what Nicoll had told me and suggested that he show it to Lloyd George which he did to considerable effect..[4]

In the following issue of the British Weekly Nicoll himself represented, "the amazing change which took place in public opinion between Friday 1st July and Friday August 7th".[5] Once it had been made clear to him that the Government was committing itself to intervention Nicoll prepared for the battle. The editor explained his position to the British Weekly readership in a leader "United We Stand":

> To say "My country; right or wrong" is to renounce humanity and to defy God. Only one must be very certain of his ground if he sets himself to weaken and worry and discredit a Government that has been forced to arms in a deadly struggle.[6]

Dr. John Clifford experienced a similar change of heart and revealed that he had, "actually drafted a letter to the Press in favour of...British neutrality..." on his

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[4] 3rd August, McEwen, The Riddell Diaries, pp.87-88.

[5] Riddell to Nicoll, 13th August 1914, Nicoll Papers, in Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.128. Riddell was reporting the view of Lloyd George.

[6] British Weekly, 6th August 1914. In a letter to his wife Nicoll revealed few signs of ambivalence concerning the leader. He wrote; "I have never had a more busy and anxious week. I have sent you the first two copies of the B.W. and I think you will like the leader. We are in for it and must tighten our belts." Nicoll to Catherine Robertson Nicoll 5th August 1914, in C. Robertson Nicoll, Under the Bay Tree, London 1935.

way home from a trip abroad, "...But when, arriving in England, he had become acquainted with Germany's proposals and actions, he had [decided] to keep the letter back". Clifford was fortified by the knowledge that the British had been forced into war.[7]

It was important that Nonconformist leaders explain their conversion from a traditional position of peace and disarmament. They had to find a tone which would excite Free Churchmen into loyalty to the Government without alienating those who found it difficult to countenance war. In her "Woman's World" column on 6th August Jane Stoddart reflected the editor's message elsewhere in the British Weekly. She recognised that most women wanted peace but given that the decision had been taken Stoddart urged women to echo the words of the captain in a great storm, all the night crying to the man at the helm, "steady, steady, steady".

Throughout this issue the British Weekly carried the residual language of neutrality. It reported the sermon of the London Congregationalist Dr. Campbell Morgan which had been delivered the Sunday before war had been declared. He spoke of those who wanted war as the "accursed of the human kind". A letter to the editor - dated 3rd August - from a Manse in Gunnersbury moved that people everywhere should

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[7] Christian World, 20th August 1914, in Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.129.

demand that England keep herself isolated from the war movements.[8]

In the controlled medium of the British Weekly Nicoll affected the wrestling of the collective Nonconformist conscience over the question of the rightness of the war. A series of leaders appeared throughout the autumn of 1914 which confronted the problem of reconciling the Biblical message of peace with a European war waged against fellow Christians. In his leaders, "The Christian Community and the War" and "The Churches and the War" Nicoll attempted to convey the message that those who partook in war could still be witnesses of Christ while reminding readers that Germans too had been created in God's image.[9]

At the end of August the War Office asked Nicoll to write the appeal to Free Churchmen.[10] This "Appeal to Young Nonconformists" appeared in a large number of daily newspapers and was later printed in the pamphlet "Set Down My Name Sir".[11] The reuse of the reference to "Pilgrim's Progress" echoed Nicoll's campaign for recruits in the cause of passive resistance and suggested that once again the Free Church conscience was being outraged: religious men must fight the enemy of liberty and democracy. Nicoll

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[8] British Weekly, 6th August 1914.

[9] British Weekly, 13th August 1914. By 28th January 1915 however the British Weekly endorsed the view that the "War Book" issued by the German General Staff - which taught the German army that the ends justified any means - embodied the very essence of Antichrist.

[10] Nicoll to Catherine Robertson Nicoll, 2nd September 1914, C.R.Nicoll, Under the Bay Tree, p.250.

[11] Darlow, op.cit., p.240.

called for Nonconformist support - in the name of the Free Church fathers of the past and the children of the future - in the war against the German Emperor revealed "as a tyrant whose whole life [had] been a lie".[12] In this first year of the war the British Weekly campaigned hard for voluntary recruits arguing that the war was not a time for stupefaction or depression but a time calling men to their posts. "If the voluntary effort fails," Nicoll warned, "then there must be a need for conscription, but that we hope and believe is needless".[13] In mid October the writer Coulson Kernahan wrote thanking Nicoll for his war and recruiting articles which rendered a great service to the nation.[14] The following month the British Weekly leader "More Men and Still More Men" reasserted its belief that conscription was alien to the genius of the people but feared that it would be necessary: "We hate Conscription. But we hate defeat infinitely more".[15] Tentative apologetics for conscription were carried alongside calls for the reorganisation of the Recruiting Department.[16] Nicoll (through Riddell) attempted to ascertain Lloyd George's views as to a further article criticising the War

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[12] Set Down My Name Sir, London 1914, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[13] British Weekly, 3rd September 1914.

[14] Coulson Kernahan to Nicoll, 13th October 1914, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[15] British Weekly, 12th November 1914.

[16] British Weekly, 12 November 1914, 19th November 1914.

Office's arrangements for recruiting but received little information.[17]

The British Weekly disparaged Church leaders who felt unable to join in the war effort and offered words of comfort and understanding to those whose ministers appeared to shy away from the real world.[18] This hostility attempted to defeat even silent opposition to the fighting. Biblical justification of pacifism had to be rationalised away. The British Weekly dismissed literal interpretations of the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" or the Sermon on the Mount's message that, "whosoever smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also".[19] Denney and D.C. Lathbury added their weight to the side of the righteousness of the war. In leaders written for the British Weekly both attempted to depict the face of Christ in the midst of the conflict. According to Denney it was the nation's immediate duty to stake everything in defence of its own freedom and of the very elements of justice and international relations. He accepted that patriotism had a place so long as it was subordinated to the Kingdom of God.[20] Lathbury argued that Christianity - which had always recognised the case for a righteous war - existed in a variety of nations and cultures and therefore accepted within its pale the process of *national* settlement; which

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[17] 22nd November 1914, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62974, ff.254-5.

[18] British Weekly, 22nd October 1914.

[19] British Weekly, 22nd October 1914.

[20] "The War and the National Conscience" by James Denney, in the British Weekly, 20th August 1914.

is war: "Christianity took the world as it found it and did its best to make it better. But it did so in its own way,...by transforming individuals, not communities".[21]

At the "great dissenting recruiting meeting" at the City Temple on 10th November, Nicoll asserted that, "if we had not been Christians we should not have been in this war. It is Christ who has taught us to fight for liberty, righteousness and Peace".[22] Nicoll was echoing an address he had delivered just over a week before in which he declared that:

> The love of Liberty, the abhorrence of tyranny, the care for the rights of other nations, the sacred obligations of honour, would have had no power to move us to battle had it not been for the spirit of Christ within us.[23]

The meeting which Nicoll chaired on 10th November was an important bid to rally the Free Churches behind the war effort. It had been arranged that Clifford chair the proceedings but Lloyd George opposed this in favour of Nicoll with the argument that the Baptist element would be too strong. Riddell construed this to mean that Lloyd George did not want to speak after Clifford who would start the meeting on too high a key. "Nicoll on the contrary would say something striking and appropriate but in a low tone which would not spoil the effect for L.G...," Riddell

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[21] D.C.Lathbury, "Christianity and the War," British Weekly, 15th October 1914.

[22] British Weekly, 12th November 1914.

[23] From an address delivered at the City Temple, 30th October 1914, in the British Weekly, 5th November 1914.

pondered, "he [Lloyd George] is very clever in managing these things. He has thought out all the tricks of the oratorical trade even down to the setting in which the chief performer should appear".[24]

Nonconformist opinion on the war was not monolithic despite the efforts of Lloyd George and Free Church leaders. In December Riddell recorded that Nicoll was, "very broken about the war and too excited...he [Nicoll] said that he had been at a Free Church meeting...and that...some of the dissenting ministers [were] still peace-at-any-price people. 'Varmits' he [Nicoll] called them". Nicoll's sympathy was with militant Free Churchmen; but for the intervention of Stoddart and Riddell the editor was willing to insert in the British Weekly a story which urged the nation to pray for the destruction of Germany. It was left to the more secular Riddell to reinforce Stoddart's protestations with the observation that, "a religious newspaper should not accentuate the asperities of the situation".[25]

Lloyd George's posthumous tribute that, "had it not been for Nicoll's attitude, the Free Churches might have taken a different line, and the whole course of the war might have been altered,"[26] greatly exaggerates Nicoll's influence, but the remark is a reminder that the Free

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[24] 28th October 1914, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62974, ff.213-214.

[25] 1st December 1914, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62974, f.263.

[26] 6th May 1923, G.Riddell, An Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923, London 1933, p.406.

Churches were very vulnerable to schism. In December 1914 Riddell wrote:

> It is obvious that there is a peace party on the move in the Liberal camp. I told L.G. that many of the dissenting ministers were pacifists. This had been ascertained by sending copies of L.G.'s City Temple speech to various chapels for distribution. Some of the dissenting parsons, mostly Baptists, had replied that they could not distribute the copies. L.G. asked me to obtain these replies so that he might read them and consider what steps should be taken to alter the opinion of the writers.[27]

Despite the flimsy nature of the research, the suggestion that certain community leaders were ambivalent about the war had to be taken seriously. The following March the National Free Church Council supported a motion which was an attempt to alienate the smallest number; "Our duty is to render such service to the nation as the war demands; to maintain the Christian attitude in the national life; to combat the tendency to militarism".[28] In 1916 Nicoll felt able to admit to his readership the danger at the war's outset that the Free Churches would not stand united. The editor congratulated Nonconformity on its rock like stand, "Her resistance to the interpretations and the arguments of Pacifism has been absolute".[29]

Christianity may have been mobilised behind the war effort but the carnage posed a deeper problem for religious faith. In 1915 the Principal of the Yorkshire United

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[27] 5th December 1914, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62974, f.267.

[28] British Weekly, 11th March 1915.

[29] British Weekly, 2nd November 1916.

Independent College recognised that the "outlook on the Universe and on God [had] suddenly darkened;...the pillars of faith for many of us lie prone and shattered on the ground". The challenge to the Church was to make itself relevant at a time when it appeared that the war "had suddenly confronted Man with *himself*, not as the child of God, but as the offspring of the Devil".[30]

This was a common theme in religious writing during the war. The British Weekly wrote:

> The war is searching our religion and testing our faith to its core...We no longer treat this as the best of all possible worlds,...We have left debating whether the devil exists, now that we are faced with an apocalypse of naked devilry.[31]

This awareness on the part of religious leaders that the war would have a devastating effect on Christianity did not protect them from the confusion of its aftermath. The militarism of the British Weekly left it implicated in the destructiveness of the war effort and left much of its Christian stoicism sounding hollow. The Liberal party also had to convert itself to cope with the conflict and it too discovered that much of its pre-war essence had been eroded by the emergency. The British Weekly supported fully an interventionist approach on behalf of the Government and became dislocated from the debate over the true nature of liberalism. When it did attempt to recreate its liberal persona in the post-war world much of the language sounded

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[30] E. Griffith-Jones, The Challenge of Christianity to a World at War, London 1915, p.xii, p.xv.

[31] British Weekly, 2nd September 1915.

more convenient than passionate. Lloyd George had lost credibility as a Liberal and the British Weekly was heavily defined by its association with him.

ii. The Quest for Information:

Nicoll was determined to bury party politics underneath the war effort. In 1915 he wrote:

> I have no politics now. I am concerned only with ending the War. I can see that when the War is over parties will arrange themselves on a new basis. For example I should be in strong favour of a heavy tariff on German Goods.[32]

Unlike Radical editors such as Gardiner who interpreted the national good in terms of defence of liberal democratic values, Nicoll generally saw victory as an end in itself. Nevertheless there were issues raised by the war on which the British Weekly felt bound to take a stand opposite to that of the Government. Almost immediately tension developed over the availability of information and the freedom of the press. On 20th November 1914 George Riddell recorded in his diary:

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[32] Nicoll to Professor A.E.Taylor of St.Andrews, [3rd] May 1915, Darlow, op.cit., p.244. Therefore Nicoll was comfortable with the Paris Resolutions of the following year which, among other things, agreed upon trade discrimination against Germany after the war: a policy pushed through by the business element within the Conservative party. J.Turner, British Politics and the Great War: conflict and coalition 1915-1918, New Haven, 1992, p.86.

> The Defence of the Realm Acts are being consolidated. The drastic and unique provisions of this legislation have not attracted the attention they deserve. The legislation has taken place so rapidly that the measures have not been properly discussed. The press have been singularly ill-informed and lacking in criticism regarding a law which wipes out Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, etc, in a few lines.[..][33]

Before the second reading of the Defence of the Realm Consolidation Bill, Lord Robert Cecil raised similar concerns in Parliament. He drew attention particularly to paragraph (c) of Clause 1 which gave the Government power to "prevent the spread of reports likely to cause disaffection, or alarm". Cecil suggested that interpretation of these words was extremely wide and therefore open to abuse.[34]

Bonar Law expressed concern that the Act could be used to prosecute critics of the Government. He asserted that it was the right of every Member of Parliament and every newspaper in the country to expose the incompetence of any Minister even though this may cause a weakening in the confidence of the Government.[35] In this he highlighted a problem which confronted all patriotic editors.

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[33] 20th November 1914, McEwen, The Riddell Diaries, p.95.

[34] 23rd November 1914, in The Parliamentary Debates (Official Report) Fifth Series - Vol.LXVIII, col.910. In the final Act the wording was altered so that the Government had power, "to prevent the spread of false reports or reports likely to cause disaffection to His Majesty or to interfere with the success of His Majesty's forces by land or sea or to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign powers." In The Public and General Acts, Chapter 8, London 1916.

[35] 23rd November 1914, Parliamentary Debates, Vol.LVIII, col.919.

The Second Reading of the Defence of the Realm Consolidation Bill also underlined the extent to which the war put pressure on Liberal supporters as well as the Opposition. In Parliament Bonar Law voiced a general concern:

> that the Government should not ask for greater powers than are necessary, and that they should be most careful to show by their speeches, as well as by their acts, that they recognise the limitation of the powers which are given to them, and that they do not intend to interfere in any shape or form with legitimate criticism.[36]

On the eve of the Bill's Royal Assent the British Weekly was heavily critical of the Government's decision to suppress criticism and certain information which included recruiting figures. The British Weekly declared that the Fourth Estate would not "cower beneath the pretensions of censorship" and reminded the Government that people wanted to be governed by honesty and truth.[37] Even Lloyd George admitted to reservations about the power incorporated in D.O.R.A. Riddell recorded the Chancellor's feeling that this type of legislation was, "very dangerous and subversive of the best British traditions..."[38]

Control of information was an integral part of the broader struggle and the Press Bureau and Foreign Office News Department were set up in the early stages of the war. From the outset Nicoll was accepted as belonging to that

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[36] 23rd November 1914, Parliamentary Debates, Vol.LXVIII, col.920.

[37] British Weekly, 26th November 1914.

[38] 28th November 1914, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.96.

group of London editors which wielded most influence. A month after the war began he was among fifteen such editors invited to meet with Masterman to discuss the "doings of the Press Bureau".[39]

In general the British government found it easier to be a censor than a propagandist. Dissatisfaction with official handling of war news was compounded both by journalists' resentment of governmental restrictions and by their belief that newspapermen better understood the communication media.[40] Individual members of the Cabinet - most notably Lloyd George - had experience of cooperation with the Fourth Estate but the War Office machinery proved cumbersome when it came to the administration of information. In January 1915 both Riddell and Northcliffe supported the idea of inviting a party of French journalists to England. It was agreed that the assistance of the War Office was essential.[41] Northcliffe wrote:

> I am quite sure you will not be able to overcome the War Office. Judging from what I have seen during my second visit to the war, they do not know what they are up against. They certainly have no knowledge of diplomacy, either in the handling of the French or the Americans... The people who did not see the war coming have apparently only just realized that trouble with America is coming, and, eventually trouble with France.[42]

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[39] 8th September 1914, C.R.Nicoll, Under the Bay Tree, p.251.

[40] Koss, Political Press, p.679.

[41] Riddell to Northcliffe, 8th January 1915, Northcliffe Papers, British Library, Add MS.62173, f.42.

[42] Northcliffe to Riddell, 14th January 1915, Northcliffe Papers, B.L., Add MS.62173, f.43.

Conversely the Government held the view that the Press was unaware of the gravity of the situation. Asquith described an assembly of 25 editors of London's leading newspapers as "a cohort of possible mischief-makers".[43] Lloyd George reportedly considered that, "the papers [were] either badly informed or that wilfully they [misled] the public in order to keep up their courage...and that...it [was] harmful to present things in an unduly optimistic way". He met with Riddell and Nicoll to discuss the matter at the end of February 1915.[44] In March Riddell laid before Sir Reginald Brade his view that the authorities had a responsibility to represent both sides of Britain's performance in the war otherwise the country would fail to pull together with a sufficient sense of emergency.[45] A meeting of the politicians and the Press took place on 1st April and it was decided that closer, official links should be established between the Press and the War Office and that the former should guard against engendering false optimism.[46]

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[43] Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 1st April 1915, Brock, Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.526.

[44] 20th February 1915, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62975, f.83.

[45] 17th March 1915, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.102. The British Weekly appeared to support the view that the Press Bureau - and not the Press - was responsible for the concealment of grave facts, the disclosure of which would have done much to strengthen public determination. British weekly, 8th April 1915.

[46] 1st April 1915, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.104. Also Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.526. Riddell was appointed the representative of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association on the 9th April 1915.

Northcliffe wrote to Riddell on 20th April with the view that the Government needed to get, "really distinguished writers to make the war what it is - a matter of life or death to the nation". He suggested that Britain should follow the example of Germany and that, "responsible, fully accredited writers, artists, photographers and cinematograph operators, under the guidance of some officer and proper censorship" should be allowed to spend time with Britain's various armies.[47] The problem remained however as to what constituted "proper censorship". In October 1914 Arnold White had warned in the conservative Daily Express, "If we emerge successfully from this war, but under the yoke of a vigorous censorship of opinion, we shall only have exchanged the haunting menace of Potsdam for the very tyranny against which Milton protested in 1644".[48]

Nicoll used the discourse of freedom but had no tolerance for those who would not support the war. Within the framework of the "war effort" was the duty of politicians and journalists to divulge information which might lead to alarm or criticism of the Government. The British Weekly was a firm advocate of the notion that, "if a democracy is to act promptly and wisely it must know the truth".[49] In September 1915, frustrated by a Government which seemed to lack decisive, forward action, the British

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[47] Northcliffe to Riddell, 20th April 1915, Northcliffe Papers, B.L., Add MS.62173, ff.44-45.

[48] Daily Express, 13th October 1914, in Koss, Political Press, p.680.

[49] British Weekly, 8th July 1915.

Weekly declared, "We want to know the facts, and we want it so much that the craving must be granted".[50]

The following month the question of press freedom adopted greater urgency. The two week suppression of the Globe (for reporting that Kitchener had resigned due to a conflict with his nonmilitary colleagues) was roundly condemned with the British Weekly echoing the general view that there were other newspapers more ripe for punishment. Nicoll's journal defended the press's handling of the war but contended that journalistic criticism of the Press Bureau was universal. The British Weekly's warning that the liberties of the press had been won "very hardly" and if taken away would have very serious consequences, had gained new significance by the following issue when the Lord Chancellor hinted at further restrictive measures. The British Weekly declared the moment hardly less critical than the fateful hour in 1852 when the French press was placed under the servitude of Napoleon III.[51] Nicoll defended journalists' right to criticise the Government but wanted to see this done in a constructive way. The British Weekly was a strong critic of newspapers which issued

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[50] British Weekly, 23rd September 1915. The week before Denney had written to Nicoll, "I fancy the Germans know quite well all that the Government does not tell us, and the one thing which commands my unequivocal sympathy in the confusion is the demand for more information. Things that are not told will always be thought of outside as things too bad to tell, or things that it is someone's interest to hide." Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.251.

[51] British Weekly, 11th November 1915, 18th November 1915.

personal attacks on politicians or journalists.[52] It drew attention to the fact that every journal had criticised the Coalition Government at certain points and much of the criticism had done good. Nevertheless the British Weekly warned that criticism must be fair and patriotic and all should be underlined with the knowledge that there was no alternative to the existing Government.[53]

In March 1917 the cost of the British Weekly was increased to 2d due to the increase in the price of paper. The readership was also warned that further increases were almost certain and that supplies of paper may cease altogether.[54] The following week Nicoll wrote of the groundless rumours in Fleet Street that the Government intended to put a complete arrest on the manufacture of paper thus destroying the whole fabric of journalism.[55] Nevertheless the problem of paper supply persisted and a year later Nicoll floated the idea that newspapers agree to suspend printing one day a week to save paper.[56]

In March 1917 Riddell had written to Walter Runciman pointing to the fact that the paper makers were entitled to no sympathy. "During the war they have made larger profits than they have made for years," he concluded, "whereas the newspapers have been badly hit and are likely to suffer

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[52] British Weekly, 4th November 1915.

[53] British Weekly, 18th November 1915.

[54] British Weekly, 8th March 1917.

[55] British Weekly, 15th March 1917.

[56] British Weekly, 14th March 1918.

more as the war progresses".[57] The following year a statement sent to the War Cabinet on behalf of the Newspaper Confederation warned that the trade faced a serious crisis in the year commencing March 1918. Paper making materials had been reduced by 30% of pre war imports to 350,000 tons, of this 145,000 were required by the Government. The Cabinet was reminded that it relied on the Press Bureau to print an enormous amount of material concerning Naval and Military operations, official communiques, correspondents' dispatches and special articles as well as notices concerning recruiting, food supplies, Government loans and a host of other subjects.[58] This sense of sacrifice compounded the self image of journalists as public servants. It also underlined the extent to which newspapers saw themselves as central to the war effort, not only as the channel of information between the Government and the nation but also as the custodian of the national interest.

iii. Munitions and Men:

It was important that newspapers make their readership feel secure in their views during the war. This was a further limit on the ability of editors to criticise the

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[57] Copy of letter from Riddell to Runciman, 24th March 1917, Northcliffe Papers, B.L., Add MS.62173, ff.73-74.

[58] Statement submitted for the consideration of the War Cabinet by the Newspaper Confederation representing the London and Provincial Press. Northcliffe Papers, B.L., Add Ms.62173, ff.93-96.

Government without appearing to be unpatriotic. Nevertheless by 1915 there was a growing concern that Asquith's administration was not handling the war efficiently: specifically with regard to munitions and army recruits. The Prime Minister's position had been compromised by his declaration at Newcastle in April 1915 that there was no truth in reports that the Allies were being crippled by munitions shortages. Nicoll, who was "much annoyed" by the speech, was "disgusted with his [Asquith's] management of affairs."[59] The British Weekly suggested that Asquith's assurances did not seem, "quite in harmony with Lord Kitchener's recent statement, that the lack of munitions of war was causing him the gravest anxiety".[60]

The creation of the Coalition Government in May - which followed on Fisher's resignation and grew out of Unionist discontent - appeared to offer some hope to those who had been "furiously impatient with whatever retards or deflects the onward march of the fight".[61] The British Weekly called for drastic and decided action regarding the registration of all those medically fit, the supply of munitions, liquor interests and press censorship which should be strong and impartial.[62] Nicoll later defended

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[59] 21st April, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.108. Nicoll was also angry with Asquith's stand on the Drink question as revealed at Newcastle, Darlow, op.cit., p.250.

[60] British Weekly, 22nd April 1915.

[61] British Weekly, 27th May 1915.

[62] British Weekly, 27th May 1915.

Lloyd George to a correspondent arguing that he had no intention of taking Asquith's place:

> What he [Lloyd George] has thought, and what I have thought, almost from the beginning is that the War is not carried out with foresight and with push. Asquith seems to have no control over the varied departments and to seek no control.[63]

Lloyd George's appointment as Minister of Munitions pleased his supporters but the structure of the new Government remained inhibitive to dramatic change. Lathbury had a typical view:

> I don't altogether like the Coalition Cabinet, but, as we must all put up with it, liking does not much matter. What I wanted was a small Cabinet - The half dozen men on each side. Now, I suppose, the "Inner Cabinet" system will be more in vogue than ever. But this must, I fear, lead to a waste of Cabinet time, for I suppose the humbled member must have the decisions of the Inner Cabinet explained to him...[64]

The sinking of the *Lusitania* in May further fuelled calls for a form of compulsory service. The Morning Post, the Daily Express, the Globe, the Daily Mail and the Times all demanded conscription.[65] The British Weekly recognised that the decisive attack on the *Lusitania* added to reports of the use of poison gas and the treatment of British prisoners had led to a change of mood in the country which demanded that the whole strength of the nation be given

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[63] Nicoll to J.D.Jones, 22nd October 1915, Darlow, op.cit., p.250.

[64] Lathbury to Nicoll, 3rd June 1915, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[65] Koss, Political Press, p.714.

over to the war.[66] The political crisis prompted Garvin - whose newspaper broke the story of the coalition - and Northcliffe to attempt to push the newly formed Government into relieving Kitchener of power. Northcliffe's unsubtle denunciation of Kitchener in the Daily Mail on 21st May had the perverse effect of rallying the nation to the side of the latter and discrediting Northcliffe.[67]

The British Weekly joined in the general affirmation of support for Kitchener, refuting critics who claimed that he had failed to supply enough high explosives.[68] Correspondence between Nicoll and Northcliffe revealed that the former agreed with much that had been said in the Daily Mail but believed that personal attacks on war leaders were apt to produce sympathy for those attacked. Northcliffe defended his position revealing that he had taken personal responsibility for the campaign against Kitchener, "knowing that I should incur great unpopularity and be placing myself in a most difficult position. On 7th June Nicoll replied in concessionary spirit, "I have had much conversation with Mr Lloyd George. He said that every word you wrote was absolutely correct. Also that you had performed and are performing an eminent service to the country. He told me a number of stories about the War Office which made my blood run cold".[69]

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[66] British Weekly, 20th May 1915.

[67] Koss, Political Press, p.716.

[68] British Weekly, 27th May 1915.

[69] R.Pound and G.Harmsworth, Northcliffe, London 1959, p.481.

In a meeting with Nicoll Lloyd George had given a "most depressing account,...including a statement by the PM to the effect that [British] trenches were inadequate and not to be compared with those of the French Army". He also suggested to Nicoll that his new position as Minister of Munitions would not automatically lead the way to more efficient handling of the crisis. "Before accepting the position of Munitions Minister he [Lloyd George] had stipulated certain conditions which had not been performed," Riddell recorded, "and...he asked [Nicoll's] advice whether he should resign if they were not fulfilled". Nicoll's affirmative reply seemed to Riddell unwise.[70]

In response to Lloyd George's dissatisfaction regarding his authority and the inadequate nature of the British trenches, the British Weekly carried a strongly worded leader on 10th June. In "The Next Three Months" Nicoll stressed the short supply of munitions and warned that, "whatever may be imagined about the ferocity of their [Germany's] attack will in all probability come true". The British Weekly supported Lloyd George's view that production could only be increased if industry was subjected to militaristic organisation and urged that the Minister of Munitions should be given a free hand to carry out the necessary changes. "If Mr. Lloyd George finds he is hopelessly hampered by conditions imposed upon him by the Government, or more likely by the House of Commons,"

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[70] 9th June 1915, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62976, ff.17-18.

the British Weekly declared, "he will and should refuse to go on".[71] Riddell judged the article "injudicious" and suspected that Lloyd George had encouraged Nicoll to write a piece which "would strengthen his [Lloyd George's] hands with his colleagues and which would be quoted in other papers".[72] Lloyd George declined to accept responsibility for inspiring the article but "coloured slightly" when confronted by Riddell.[73] The British Weekly remained unrepentant in the following weeks. Indeed it stated that many letters had assured the editor that his leader had done something to clear the air.[74]

The most critical issue for the Coalition remained army recruits. The urgency with which the Government campaigned for volunteers carried with it the need to defend the voluntary principle. Conscription appeared to represent the ultimate betrayal of Liberalism. Nicoll's selective broadmindedness allowed him to approach the question of national service without attendant Liberal angst. By the end of the summer it seemed clear to Lord Milner that certain elements in the press, "like the Daily

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[71] British Weekly, 10th June 1915.

[72] 9th June 1915, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.122.

[73] 10th June 1915, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.122.

[74] British Weekly, 17th June 1915. On 19th June Riddell wrote: "McKenna spoke of Nicoll's article, wh he said had done L.G. much injury amongst his friends in the Cabinet....The Chief thinks Nicoll's article most unfortunate and prejudicial to L.G. Nicoll says he has received hundreds of letters and telegrams approving his action. The writers are mostly Bishops and persons of that type, whose view is now the true one, so Nicoll says! He who has been treating them with contempt all his life. Now they agree with him, their opinion is of value and importance!" 19th June 1915, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62976, f.34.

News, the Daily Chronicle, the Nation, & the Star have thrown themselves furiously into the anti-Northcliffe agitation with the obvious intention of using the unpopularity of Northcliffe to damage the cause of national service".[75] Nicoll's position was ambiguous. Despite the editor's apparent agreement with Northcliffe the British Weekly would not condemn Kitchener.[76] It occupied the middle ground with Garvin and Strachey on the question of a national register - compiled by the heads of each community - of men who were medically fit.[77]

Correspondence between Nicoll and D.C.Lathbury throughout June revealed that both accepted the need for national service, with the view that legislation bringing in universal service - military and industrial - was absolutely necessary.[78] Lathbury however complained that Northcliffe was "enough to bring any nation to ruin...[running] all his scares for his own ends". Lathbury expressed a view similar to the line of the British Weekly:

> ...a good few Liberals seem to me insane on compulsory service. I am not on the whole fond,

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[75] Memorandum by Milner, 29th August 1915, Milner Papers, in Koss, Political Press, p.722.

[76] In November rumours of Kitchener's resignation led the British Weekly to restate its support for the war leader. It contended that popular respect for Kitchener had grown from his unceasing labours; prescience; love for the Army; and brotherly friendship with France. British Weekly, 11th November 1915.

[77] British Weekly, 27th May 1915.

[78] Lathbury to Nicoll, 3rd June 1915, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

> in the midst of a war, unless recruiting evidently fails, which I still hope it will not. But the objection about liberty is like a sick man objecting to an operation after it has been proved necessary.[79]

The following month Nicoll was prompted into reiterating his position on conscription by the correspondence of the Secretary of the Association of Lancashire and Cheshire Baptist Churches. The Rev. Hector V. Thomas wrote to refute the (mistaken) impression that the British Weekly, as an advocate of conscription represented the view of Nonconformists. Nicoll replied that he had over and over again deprecated conscription, but with the view that "in the last peril of the nation's life, recourse to it might be a necessity...I have steadfastly opposed conscription as contrary to the genius of the British people and unneeded at this time".[80] The British Weekly applauded the Government's "very wise and popular step" in deciding to enrol all persons between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five and supported the appointment of Lord Derby as Director-General of Recruiting. Both represented the last bid of the voluntary principle.[81]

The failure of a significant number of single men to attest to the Government forced Asquith to honour his pledge and introduce a degree of compulsion. The British

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[79] Lathbury to Nicoll, 20th June 1915, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[80] British Weekly, 8th July 1915.

[81] British Weekly, 1st July 1915, 7th October 1915.

Weekly responded with Christian stoicism by reminding those soldiers called at such a glorious hour that they were helping to carry the cross of Jesus Christ.[82] In the same issue Jane Stoddart attacked Dr. Clifford's New Year's Address at Westbourne Park which repeated his aversion to increased militarism. In an very uncharacteristically harsh report she accused those, like Clifford and Campbell Morgan who opposed conscription, of fastening Germany's rule upon Britain. Clifford's contention that English factories were supplying shells for several other allied countries was derided as "dangerous nonsense".[83]

The following month the British Weekly railed even further against its radical past with its controversial leader, "Work for Lord Northcliffe". The premise of Nicoll's argument was that the owner of the Times and Daily Mail should be harnessed to the side of the Government, giving him a vested interest in offering only *constructive* criticism. The British Weekly suggested that Northcliffe become Air Minister but concluded, "we do not much care what service Lord Northcliffe undertakes. What we are sure of is that, for his sake and for the sake of the country, he ought to be in service".[84]

Despite a high proportion of readers writing to support the proposition, Nicoll's kite was "generally regarded with ridicule". Lloyd George feared that the British Weekly editor had made "a grave error in starting

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[82] British Weekly, 6th January 1916.

[83] British Weekly, 6th January 1916.

[84] British Weekly, 10th February 1916.

the idea that N[orthcliffe] should be bought off with a seat in the Cabinet".[85] Riddell's derision belied the fact that in many circles Northcliffe was seen as a possible Cabinet member.[86] By the end of 1916 the Star led with an article which argued that "The fatal mistake made by Mr. Asquith was that he neither fought Lord Northcliffe nor used him. He ignored him".[87] Indeed Lloyd George offered the newspaper baron the position of Air Minister in November 1917 and Northcliffe finally agreed to join the Government the following year as Director of the Ministry of Propaganda.[88] Nevertheless its claim, at the end of 1916, that the British Weekly had always been on the Radical side and continued to be so[89], seemed hollow alongside a defence of Northcliffe's campaigns against Governmental bungling and its attack on the Daily News as

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[85] 11th February 1916, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, pp.146-147.

[86] Pound and Harmsworth, Northcliffe, p.498.

[87] British Weekly, 14th December 1916.

[88] Clarke, T., My Northcliffe Diary, London 1931, p.115. Nicoll was not deterred from his view and on 14th September 1916 wrote to a correspondent, "...if Lord Northcliffe had been appointed to the Air Ministry we should have had no fear of Zeppelins." Darlow, op.cit., p.257.
Nicoll's publisher Ernest Hodder-Williams sided with Northcliffe in May 1918 over the Press Bureau's decision to stop the publication of Desperate Germany - a compilation of Daily Mail articles. The ban prompted Hodder Williams to write to Northcliffe offering support for publication *without* the Press Bureau's permission. This support was readily agreed and it was left to Nicoll to advise against issuing the book, "in face of such a strong appeal from Lord Newton." Hodder Williams to Northcliffe, 8th May 1918, Add MS.62174, f.175, Northcliffe to Hodder-Williams, 8th May 1918, Add MS.62174, f.177, Hodder-Williams to Northcliffe, 14th May 1918, Northcliffe Papers, B.L., Add MS. 62174, f.180.

[89] British Weekly, 14th December 1916.

the worst offender against all the laws of decent journalism.

Despite his unpredictable responses Nicoll was much courted by M.Ps. April 1916 presented one of several occasions when Lloyd George consulted Nicoll about the possibility of resignation. Riddell and C.P. Scott were also present and the consensus emerged that Lloyd George should resign if he felt the war was being inefficiently conducted and resignation was a possible remedy. Nicoll and Scott reportedly advised, "You [Lloyd George] must remain in the House of Commons and form, not an opposition, but a party of criticism".[90] In the same month Riddell wrote that Fisher was evidently "doing his utmost to capture Nicoll, and I doubt whether he has not succeeded in weakening Nicoll's strong partisanship for Lloyd George".[91] Montagu had also been attempting to "cultivate" Nicoll without much success. This was in part due to Nicoll's anti-Semitism. Nicoll described Montagu as a "cynical self-seeking Jew, devoid of personal charm". He also "made some caustic observations" on Venetia Stanley, calling her a female Judas.[92]

In June 1916 Lloyd George was offered the position of Secretary of State for War and he called Nicoll, Addison and Riddell to discuss whether he should accept the

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[90] 13th April 1916, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.151.

[91] 13th April 1916, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62977, f.104.

[92] 2nd August 1916, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62978, f.46. In August 1915 Churchill had also expressed interest in meeting Nicoll to try to generate some effective criticism. McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.128.

position or resign and form an opposition with Carson. Nicoll was absolutely certain that Lloyd George should accept the office: "Do not haggle about powers. You will later get all the powers you want. Your appointment to the War Office will hearten the country and the Allies...If you refuse you will occasion consternation and dismay. I implore you to accept the P.M.'s offer".[93]

By the end of December 1916 it was Asquith's position which had become untenable and under pressure from Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Carson he was effectively usurped. The broader concern over the failure to open up a successful Eastern Front was transferred onto the determination to reform the specific and real administrative problem of the War Committee.[94] The British Weekly welcomed the new Government and, while conceding the greatest respect for Asquith, admitted that it had long remarked his fatal want of decision: "In short, our policy needed a bold, resolute and powerful hand, and we believe that that hand has been found and set to work".[95]

iv. Laissez-faire in War Time:

The lack of sentimentality which the British Weekly showed over the Liberal principle of voluntary recruitment

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[93] 15th June 1916, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62977, f.184.

[94] A.Marwick, The Deluge: British society and the First World War, London 1989, (1st published 1965), p.182.

[95] British Weekly, 14th December 1916.

was extended to other areas of state intervention during the war. Free Trade was an early casualty and was not mourned in the columns of Nicoll's newspaper. In February 1915 it wrote:

> The Government, by prohibiting new investments of capital in foreign countries, and only allowing them on conditions even in the King's dominions, has made everyone see that there is one thing in the world at least which is beyond price, and to which all savings if need be must be sacrificed - the life and independence of the State.[96]

In September McKenna's supplementary War Budget made the first real intrusion on laissez-faire, imposing duties on imported cars, motor-cycles, films, clocks, watches and musical instruments. The British Weekly was only disappointed that it did not go further by putting a tax on spirits and declared it "The greatest Budget in the history of the British Empire".[97] More typically of the British Weekly's editorial line was W.R.N.'s "War Note" of 1916 which recognised that the Free Trade policy must be modified by the war experience, but which did not put forward its own specific proposals for how this should be accomplished.[98] As in peace time, Chiozza Money (who wrote his column "Social Questions" until Dec.1916) was left to do much of the social soul-searching on the British

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[96] British Weekly, 4th February 1915.

[97] British Weekly, 23rd September 1915.

[98] British Weekly, 5th October 1916.

behalf. Through his column, Money pilloried land-lords for raising the rents of poor people during the war and called on the Government to maintain its support of the peace-time infrastructures: specifically education.[99] In general he was not saying anything which was not being echoed in the Radical press.

Chiozza Money's main campaign was on behalf of greater governmental intervention: control of production, distribution and exchange. By February 1915 it was accepted that in the previous twelve months the price of flour had risen by 75%, home meat by 6%, imported meat by 12% and sugar by 72%.[100] In May Money wrote urging the Government to end its attachment to laissez-faire:

> If the war lasts for three years, and the policy of "laissez-faire" is continued, then we may expect to see bread at more than a shilling. It is the duty of the Government to consider all these things on a very large scale...There is only one way for the Government to end these misfortunes, and that is to take things in hand and to control trading interests in the public interest.[101]

The following year fear of famine became more acute in Britain and caught the imagination of the British Weekly. Consequently the newspaper as a whole threw its support behind the greater control of food. The threat of starvation was also used to encourage support for stricter liquor legislation. Money expressed his dissatisfaction at the Food Report which was published in October 1916 and

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[99] British Weekly, 13th May 1915, 29th July 1915.

[100] Marwick, The Deluge, p.42.

[101] British Weekly, 20th May 1915.

supported the Minority view that the Government should take control of the purchasing of meat and bacon.[102] When the Government finally took control of the supply of wheat, Money (in the only reference in the British Weekly) pressed Runciman at the Board of Trade to take control of meat, dairy produce, margarine, feeding stuffs and manure for farmers, tea and shipping, warning: "The supplies of these islands have lost their old safety, and our statesmen have a grave responsibility in these matters".[103]

The British Weekly expressed great satisfaction at the appointment of Lord Devonport as Food Controller in November 1916. It had no reservations about the extensive powers of the "most essential man in the Empire" who was empowered to take actions against anyone wasting food; proscribe the purpose for which any article may or may not be used; introduce a standard bread; deal with the mode of sale and distribution of articles and fix prices where possible. In his signed "War Notes" Nicoll gave his complete support to these changes and indeed urged Runciman to go further by bringing in State control of shipping and appointing a "Food Dictator" who would look into control of agricultural produce.[104] Therefore the British Weekly was not surprisingly supportive of rationing and indeed in 1917 Nicoll wanted the Government to extend voluntary rationing schemes to all food-stuffs rather than simply bread, in

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[102] British Weekly, 12th October 1916.

[103] British Weekly, 19th October 1916.

[104] British Weekly, 23rd November, 30th November 1916.

order to be fair to the poor.[105] Nicoll was not as radical as Chiozza Money in his support for State control and as late as July 1917 he wrote:

> We have not the smallest faith in the proposal to call in the State to sell bread at a lower price than it can be manufactured at. The end we are aiming at should be reached by the suppression of profiteering, and that must be tried first.[106]

The British Weekly took little interest in the battle between workers and government during the war and reported dispassionately on the talks between Lloyd George and the workers on the Clyde in March 1915.[107] It supported the Munitions Bill of that year which suspended trade union rules and gave the Munitions Department the power to declare any munitions factory a "controlled establishment". In a runaway piece which owed as much to Nicoll's habit of dictating large sections of the newspaper as to his distance from the working class, the British Weekly warned that if Germany won the war the British working classes would be "reduced to the position of slaves, toiling under conditions far more terrible than those of the negroes described in Uncle Tom's Cabin".[108]

Alongside this warning to the British worker was the realization that the capitalists must also give up their

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[105] British Weekly, 3rd May 1917.

[106] British Weekly, 12th July 1917.

[107] British Weekly, 4th March 1915.

[108] British Weekly, 1st July 1915.

rights of profit to the State.[109] Chiozza Money was much more vocal on this matter than Nicoll and warned of the dangers of the worker perceiving the war as a capitalist conspiracy. However Money did over emphasise the extent to which industrialists had been disadvantaged by government legislation, writing that the liberty of the capitalist had been far more restricted by the Munitions Act than the liberty of the worker.[110]

In general however the British Weekly was not preoccupied with the issues of distribution and exchange unless they involved the drink traffic. The remarkable aspect of the British Weekly's war was the extent to which it maintained its Free Church agenda.

v. The Welsh Church Postponement Bill:

There were perceptible differences between Nicoll and the main body of Free Church leaders. In 1914 Riddell had observed:

> L.G. Nicoll and Illingworth are the dissenters' heros, but they are not really as in sympathy with them as they are with me...Nicoll is a dear, kind creature, a lover of freedom and democracy, but he is too broadminded and the same applies to L.G. The Campbells and Cliffords have a kind of inkling of the differences between themselves and

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[109] British Weekly, 1st July 1915.

[110] British Weekly, 20th January 1916.

> Illingworth & Co. but they don't like to probe too deep.[111]

However Nicoll was always easily roused when Nonconformists appeared to be ignored or threatened. So it was, in the midst of war, Nicoll battled fiercely with the Government over its Bill in 1915 to postpone any attempt to disendow the Church in Wales until six months after the war had ended. The Bill was to be passed with bipartisan support on the understanding that should the Opposition be in power at this time they would not prevent the Bill coming into effect. McKenna failed to consult the Welsh Nonconformist M.P.s and was therefore charged with colluding with the enemy and once again riding rough shod over traditional Liberal supporters.[112] Nicoll dined with Riddell on 10th March and was recorded as:

> furious at what he describes as the Government betrayal of the Dissenters over the Welsh Church Bill - the operation of which it is proposed to postpone by agreement. Nicoll vows that the Dissenters will not rest under this injustice. He begged me to convey this to Lloyd George.[113]

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[111] 10th November 1914, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62974, ff.237-9.

[112] Even Asquith conceded the Nonconformists' grievance. He wrote to Venetia Stanley, "...As you know, I have never loved them [Welsh Free Churchmen] but there is no doubt that they have a real grievance in the way they have been mishandled. They believe (not altogether without reason) that they have been both flouted and hoodwinked by McK..." 12 March 1915, Brock, Asquith's Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.474.

[113] 10th March 1915, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.102.

The following day the British Weekly announced that it was the duty of Welsh representatives and Welsh people to promote unrelenting opposition to the Disestablishment Bill. It challenged the Government to bring in such a measure with the help of Tory votes at the price of moral defeat with far reaching consequences.[114]

Asquith and Lloyd George had to employ their powers of diplomacy to appease both the Established and Free Church sections in the Commons. When the Welsh Church Act was being debated in Cabinet in August 1914, Asquith recorded that "not for the first (or perhaps the last) time I was able to devise a form of face-saving words wh. pleased everybody..."[115] On 12th March 1915 Asquith was visited by Robert Cecil who tried to restrict the actions of the Government with the claim of "breach of faith". Asquith pondered that if "he [Cecil] makes more of his foul attacks it will have the incidental effect of angering the Welsh & perhaps making them more tractable".[116] It had become, as Lloyd George observed, "a horrible mess".[117]

On 15th March, in Asquith's view, the Government had manoeuvred its way through the Welsh Church impasse in the Commons. Lloyd George made a powerful speech in the House in an attempt to appease his fellow Welshmen who later met

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[114] British Weekly, 11th March 1915.

[115] Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 10th August 1914, Brock, Asquith's Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.163.

[116] Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 12 March 1915, Brock, Asquith's Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.477.

[117] Lloyd George to Riddell, 13 March 1915, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.102.

with the Prime Minister, his Chancellor and Home Secretary. Asquith wrote sardonically to Venetia Stanley, "I hope & believe they have gone back to their mountains & vales with the fear of God in their consciences: and a certain apprehension of fiery vengeance, if they don't 'toe the line'...of reason and common sense".[118]

Lloyd George knew Welsh Nonconformity better than to believe it could be so easily intimidated. He wrote a lengthy letter to Nicoll on 16th in a bid to win the editor over with reason, veiled threats and flattery, "know[ing] what an influence [Nicoll's] articles exert upon Nonconformist opinion". Lloyd George recognised that non-consultation with Nonconformists had been, "an unpardonable offence as well as a blunder" and asserted that both he and the Prime Minister had been under the impression that the Free Churches had actually assented to the principle of the Bill before the Government entered into an arrangement with the Opposition. The Chancellor also argued that the Bill would in fact make repeal impossible and therefore it marked the end of religious inequality in Wales.

Lloyd George laid stress on the fact that the controversy was taking place during war time and urged Nicoll to avoid a struggle which would weaken the power of the Ministry at a most critical moment. He also warned that the war may dismantle support for religious controversies:

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[118] Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 15 March 1915, Brock, Asquith's Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.481.

> For the first time there is an atmosphere of settlement about the question, and it is a settlement on exceedingly cheap terms for Nonconformity. It would be a cardinal mistake for Welsh Nonconformity to destroy this hopeful position. One never knows what a general-election will bring forth, but at the post-bellum election the country will be concerned with reconstruction, and they will be impatient of the obtrusion of stale issues. Therefore Party leaders would be anxious to rule out questions which the public will view with distaste. Whatever anyone may say the people of England will regard this as a closing of the controversy, and they will be angry with anyone that (sic) opens it.[119]

McKenna also began a correspondence with Nicoll concerning the Bill. The editor declined an invitation by the Home Secretary, saying to Riddell, "I am not going to run after Ministers. I want nothing from them. If they want to see me let them come to me".[120] Despite attempts at conciliation the British Weekly carried a leader two days later which relied on out-dated rhetoric. It declared that no settlement was possible without radical changes to the Bill and once again reminded the Liberal party that they owed their power to Nonconformist support. The British Weekly warned Liberals that they could not present themselves as the lesser of two evils indefinitely and hinted that the patience which the Free Churches had shown

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[119] Lloyd George to Nicoll, 16th March 1915, Nicoll Papers, N.L.S., MS.15941, ff76-78.

[120] 17th March 1915, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62975, f.110.

over the Government's failure to pass an Education Bill was not inexhaustible.[121]

This indignation lasted only a week and in the following issue the British weekly announced its decision to withhold further comment on the Disestablishment "compromise" following McKenna's letter to the North Monmouthshire Liberal Association. The Home Secretary stated categorically that, "As a condition of the postponement [the Government] has a binding agreement that the ecclesiastical corporations shall be dissolved and national endowments transferred to the Welsh Commissioners".[122] Equally significant in altering the viewpoint of the British Weekly were the letters to its editor from McKenna. On 31st March Riddell wrote:

> Dined with Robertson Nicoll who said he had altogether some six letters from McKenna regarding the Welsh Disestablishment Postponement Bill in which he said he had received guarantees from the Tories that no attempt would be made to upset the Disestablishment Bill and that any change would be limited to a comparatively small 100,000. He also said that he, McKenna, could assure him on his word of honour that he had not been responsible for the neglect to consult the Welsh members.[123]

At the beginning of April J. Hugh Edwards contributed a piece to the British Weekly on the Disestablishment Bill which was an attempt to pull the strings of the debate

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[121] British Weekly, 18th March 1915.

[122] British Weekly, 25th March 1915.

[123] 31st March 1915, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62975, f.121.

together. Despite Nicoll's private assurances that the Welsh Free Churches would not again be overlooked, he had been "bombarded with letters" from Dissenters furious at the Welsh Bill.[124] Edwards noted that Nonconformists had spoken with striking unanimity but was tardy in his continued assertion that the Government's arrangement with the Opposition exposed the Welsh Church Act to the gravest of risks.[125] Both Nicoll and Edwards negotiated the fine line between hostility towards the Government and a desire to absolve individuals from blame. Despite the boast of political Nonconformists that the Government relied upon their support it would have extremely foolish to alienate McKenna or Lloyd George - men who traditionally championed the cause of the Free Churches.[126] On announcing its moratorium, the British Weekly made it clear that McKenna was not responsible for the misunderstanding which led to the Welsh Members not being consulted.[127] Furthermore Edwards stated that no one believed that Lloyd George had

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[124] 7th April 1915, Riddell Diaries, B. L., Add MS.62975, f.139.

[125] British Weekly, 8th April 1915.

[126] On 10th August 1914, Asquith wrote to Venetia Stanley; "We had a long & rather critical Cabinet this morning: the main question being (as I told you) what I was to say on the Adjournment about the Home Rule & Welsh Church Bills.....McKenna & Ll.George (quite properly & with good temper) took up the Nationalist & Welsh cudgels..." in Asquith's Letters to Venetia Stanley, op.cit., p.163.

[127] British Weekly, 25th March 1915.In private however Nicoll called him "McKenna the mis-manager." 7th April 1915, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62975, f.139.

bartered away the interests of his Nonconformist countrymen.[128]

Nicoll was very good at making a lot of noise about Free Church issues. It was a way of reminding the Government that Nonconformists still represented a cohesive force and warning that their consciences could not be ignored. However the illusion of political homogeneity had become increasingly slender as class became a more important definer of cultural background than religion. Nicoll had no real response to Lloyd George's pragmatism. Although conscience was not whimsical the Free Churches could not be seen to undermine the Government at such a moment. Furthermore, as Lloyd George had stated, Welsh Disestablishment was now guaranteed.

vi. The Liquor Trade:

Lloyd George came into more bitter conflict with the Free Churches over his plans to purchase the liquor trade on behalf of the state. Four months before the outbreak of war the Times had published a letter from the secretary of the U.K. Alliance which revealed that in 1913 the British population had spent as much on spirits as they had on the

[128] British Weekly, 8th April 1915, Edwards did qualify this statement with the fear that in his desire to subordinate sectarian interests to the supreme need of the country in the time of war, Lloyd George had forgotten that he was dealing with the astutest of ecclesiastical diplomats.

Navy.[129] Once the war was underway this indulgence was attacked more severely. The British Weekly protested that wartime supporters of temperance reform were not all peacetime puritans but it remained true that traditionally the Free Churches had moral and political interests in curbing alcohol consumption.[130]

Within the context of the war the "Drink Problem" became part of the broader question of munitions supply. Once Lloyd George had decided that excessive alcohol consumption was no less than a "peril to [Britain's] armies" he began the process of "stir[ring] up public opinion on the subject...with a view to making strong action possible".[131] In February 1915 the Chancellor told an audience at Bangor in Wales that Drink was doing more damage in the War than all the German submarines put together.[132] On 8th March Denney wrote to Nicoll of Scotland's support for drastic action on the use of liquor during the war, prompting: "If you can do anything - as I am sure you can do much - to promote so good an object, you will earn the gratitude of everyone who loves his

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[129] British Weekly, 16th April 1914.

[130] At the end of November Lloyd George intended to send Kitchener a British Weekly leader regarding drink in the camps. But he thought it would be best to send the leader only, "as if Kitchener saw that the British Weekly was a religious paper, perhaps he would take no notice of it." 22nd November 1914, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62974, ff.254-5.

[131] D.Lloyd George, War Memoirs Vol.I, London 1938, p.193.

[132] Ibid., p.194.

country".[133] Three days later the British Weekly carried a leader which pointed to Russia's example of sobriety and urged the Government to pass similar measures which could be repealed when the war ended.[134] But the British Weekly's hopes for prohibitionist legislation were far removed from the scheme of State Purchase being concocted by Lloyd George.

On 25th March Asquith revealed to Venetia Stanley that Lloyd George was:

> for the moment red-hot with a plan, or rather an idea, for nationalising the drink trade!...I warned him to go warily: a State monopoly in drink would I think be a most dangerous thing politically. But I am for surveying the ground, particularly on the lines of compensation and public control. The professional temperance lot - Leif Jones & Co - wd. be aghast if they knew that anything of the kind was on the stocks.[135]

At the end of March both the King and Kitchener pledged to abstain from alcohol during the course of the war but self denial was not generally infectious. On the 29th Lloyd George met a deputation from the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation which put forward the case for total prohibition during the course of the war. It was argued that days lost in vital industries due to the effects of

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[133] Denney to Nicoll, 8th March 1915, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.246.

[134] British Weekly, 11th March 1915. The following day Denney wrote to Nicoll: "I was delighted to read your pronouncement on drinking...it could not have been more effectively done, nor put on a more unimpeachable ground, and I am sure all right-minded people are grateful to you..." Letters of Denney to Nicoll, pp.246-7.

[135] Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 25th March 1915, Asquith's Letters to Venetia Stanley, pp.508-509.

alcohol were helping to undermine the war effort. In reply Lloyd George asserted that success in the war had become purely a question of munitions.[136] This type of language did more than stir up public opinion, it rendered indefensible Governmental inactivity on the drink question. Indeed when the National Government was formed at the end of May the British Weekly remarked characteristically that the Liberal Ministry had worked well up to a point but it had incorporated certain weaknesses - and it was its failure to deal with the Drink question which had first awakened the public's profound misgivings.[137]

Asquith's correspondence with Venetia Stanley revealed his concern that Lloyd George had "completely lost his head" over the question of drink: "His mind apparently oscillates from hour to hour between the two poles of absurdity: cutting off all drink from the working man, wh. wd. lead to something like a universal strike; and buying out (at this moment of all others) the whole liquor trade of the country, and replacing it by a huge State monopoly..."[138] Lloyd George maintained in private his view that drink was responsible for munitions shortages. Although he did not favour prohibition he thought the threat would make the trade a lot easier to deal with.[139]

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[136] Lloyd George, War Memoirs, pp.194-195.

[137] British Weekly, 27th May 1915.

[138] Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 31st March 1915, Brock, Asquith's Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.525.

[139] 2nd April 1915, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.104.

The public declaration of Lloyd George's proposed scheme of State Purchase prompted the British Weekly to declare its support for total prohibition, revising its former acceptance of a ban only on spirits. The Chancellor's plan of obtaining the drink traffic for the nation was viewed as not least a cumbersome response to an immediate problem. Nicoll's readership was reminded that Kitchener reportedly needed nine times as many munitions as were being supplied.[140] The point had been conceded by Lloyd George before the British Weekly went to print. Conversation with the Chancellor prompted Riddell to conclude that the "wild cat scheme" was dead.[141]

The verdict was premature. At the beginning of 1917 State Purchase was resuscitated and the threat was greater because its advocate was now Prime Minister. Denney had written to Nicoll on Christmas day 1916 of his conviction that a Government which did not have the moral courage to end the evil of alcohol consumption would not have the strength to win the war.[142] The Prohibitionists threw themselves into the battle against State Purchase with Clifford setting the tone at his New Year's Address, "We drink one battleship and one aeroplane a week. Is the brewer actually going to keep us from winning this war?"[143] The British Weekly became a platform for those who would

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[140] British Weekly, 22nd April 1915.

[141] 18th April 1915, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.107.

[142] Denney to Nicoll, 25th December 1916, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, pp.259-60.

[143] British Weekly, 4th January 1917.

not concede State Purchase as a temporary compromise for total prohibition. Denney contributed two leaders shortly before his death.[144] He wrote to Nicoll:

> This is a thing about which I feel very strongly, and I have written as I feel. The lapse of the *Spectator* and the *Westminster* fills me with dismay, and I am truly glad you are sticking to your guns. The need for prohibition is as urgent as ever...[145]

Throughout March and April articles in the British Weekly by Rev. J.H. Shakespeare, J. Duncan Millar, M.P. and Henry Randall used crusading language to prepare support for the meetings of the London campaign in May which culminated on the 19th at the Albert Hall.[146]

At the end of February Lloyd George wrote to the President of the National Free Church Council, Rev. J.H. Shakespeare, asking, "help in securing the fullest possible co-operation of all members of the Free Churches in carrying forward the great national campaign for economy and increased production".[147] The following week the British Weekly further dramatised the food crisis by declaring that Lloyd George had hinted in the Commons at the possibility of an approaching famine. While noting that Lloyd George had to keep the Government together, the British Weekly felt persuaded that the moment the Prime

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[144] British Weekly, 18th January and 15th February 1917.

[145] Denney to Nicol, 14th January 1917, Letters of Denney to Nicoll, p.260.

[146] British Weekly, 18th January, 15th February, 22nd February, 29th March, 26th April, 10th May 1917.

[147] British Weekly, 22nd February 1917.

Minister saw, "the Violent Spectre of famine...he will take his courage in both hands, and, acting in the name of the nation, prohibit all traffic in strong drink till the end of the war".[148]

The strength of Nicoll's coverage encouraged the Liberal M.P.s Duncan Millar and Hugh Edwards to approach the editor in a bid to co-operate in the battle. Millar contacted Nicoll on 10th March with congratulations and a suggestion that they meet.[149] By the end of the month he had contributed a leader to the British Weekly on "The Government and State Purchase".[150] Millar also contributed articles on the solid temperance campaign in Scotland which was manifest in a "huge demonstration in the Usher Hall...[at which] the new Principal of the Edinburgh University was nearly hissed down when he advocated State Purchase".[151] Towards the end of July Millar also began his weekly "Temperance Notes" which derived their style from W.R.N.'s "War Notes".[152]

In February Nicoll had written to James Moffatt:

> As to the Liquor Traffic there is no doubt that the Prime Minister is with the State Purchase people. But I still think that when the demands of the Trade become articulate they will be rejected...I believe that when the English and Scottish voters realize that they are to spend

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[148] British Weekly, 1st March 1917.

[149] Millar to Nicoll, 10th March 1917, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[150] British Weekly, 29th March 1917.

[151] Millar to Nicoll, 7th April, 4th April 1917, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[152] British Weekly, 19th July 1917.

> £150,000,000 in purchasing the existing stock of whisky, besides all other charges, they will shrink back. But there is no question that the Trade have complete power over the present Government. In fact, the Administration reeks of alcohol...It ought in fairness to L.G. to be remembered that he has always been in favour of some liquor scheme, but as he sketched it out it was very different from the scheme before the Cabinet today.[153]

These sentiments were echoed very clearly in the British Weekly "War Notes" in the following edition.[154] Stephen Koss observed that Nicoll was torn between his devotion to Lloyd George and his natural aversion to State Purchase. "His distress was intensified," Koss wrote, "by the extent to which others banked on him to press their cause".[155] But despite attempts to temper criticism of Lloyd George in the British Weekly, in private Nicoll showed no ambivalence. On 1st April Riddell told Lloyd George of Nonconformist bitterness over the proposed State Purchase of the liquor trade. "Robertson Nicoll, Dr. Clifford and others are vowing vengeance", he warned, "Nicoll compared you on Wednesday to Judas Iscariot!"[156] Lloyd George was nevertheless convinced that Prohibition was impossible because it would irritate the working classes. Riddell, who admitted that he did not like Lloyd George's State Purchase scheme, consoled the Minister with

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[153] Nicoll to Moffatt, 31 March 1917, in Darlow, op.cit., p.262.

[154] British Weekly, 5th April 1917.

[155] Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.137.

[156] 1st April 1917, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.187.

the view that many Prohibitionists were "very fond of their champagne. They want prohibition for other people".[157]

Lloyd George's meeting with advocates of Prohibition and State Purchase in April 1917 did nothing to appease traditional Nonconformist opinion. Nicoll conceded regret that the Prime Minister should appear such an enemy of a total ban and a representative at the meeting described surprise at Lloyd George's "imperfectly concealed contempt of Prohibition". The British Weekly offered lamely the belief that the Prime Minister was acting from the highest motives.[158]

Lloyd George met with Nicoll on 17th April to discuss the issue which appeared to consume the editor. Mrs Nicoll has recorded that her husband returned from lunch with the Prime Minister, Lord Milner and Lord St. Davids "very silent and tired and serious". Lloyd George told his guests that, "W.R.N. was among his greatest friends. He had pledged himself to nothing yet. He thought that State Control would be a better management than the present control...Finally, he said he would decide nothing without first consulting W.R.N. again".[159]

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[157] 1st April 1917, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62978, ff.61. This was no doubt a reference to Nicoll as the editor was no abstainer. Riddell had recorded in his diary a story told of Nicoll going to address a big meeting: "Afterwards the Committee had high tea but Nicoll was discovered at his hotel with a small bottle of champagne and a biscuit. No high tea for him." 10th November 1914, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS. 62974, ff.238-9.

[158] British Weekly, 12th April 1917.

[159] Darlow, op.cit., p.264.

The following week Nicoll received communications from the Liberal M.P. Hugh Edwards who regarded it "as a pleasure and a privilege to be of service". He enclosed extracts from Lloyd George's speeches on the Licensing Bill with specific references to fundamental principles.[160] Edwards had written to Nicoll three days before with the testimony:

> Every week I am addressing meetings in various parts of the country and on every hand I hear expressions of warm gratitude for the splendid stand which the "British Weekly" is making against State Purchase. If the project is defeated, it will be a great personal thing for you.[161]

Millar also kept Nicoll informed as to the proceedings in the House. He sent the editor an article on Bread versus Beer which might be published, "at a time when the food question has assumed the most serious character". Millar volunteered that it was intended to raise the matter in the House at the earliest possible date and promised to let Nicoll know the result of the Scottish Members' meeting to discuss the Liquor Traffic.[162]

When Riddell dined with Lloyd George at the beginning of June the Prime Minister spoke much of Nicoll's attitude in the British Weekly. Riddell wrote:

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[160] Edwards to Nicoll, 24th April 1917, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[161] Edwards to Nicoll, 21st April 1917, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[162] Millar to Nicoll, 24th April 1917, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

> L.G. will not bring himself to believe that Nicoll is strongly opposed to this scheme [State Purchase] for logical and business reasons. He ascribes N's attitude to war strain and a desire to take a course which will be popular with his readers. The latter consideration no doubt weighs strongly with Nicoll. The old boy is however very determined and very angry with L.G.[163]

The British Weekly warned Lloyd George before a visit to Scotland that some of his former supporters would feel forced to stay away because of his commitment to State Purchase.[164] On 19th July Riddell recorded:

> Robertson Nicoll is vehement against LG on state purchase of the liquor trade. He prophesies that this scheme will alienate many of LG's oldest and best friends and perhaps bring the Government down. He says that LG has reached his zenith and that he will now decline. He charges LG with treachery in regard to the drink business.[165]

Alienation from traditional Radical and Nonconformist support left Lloyd George politically isolated. He accepted Riddell's summation, "You have no party, no organisation, and no coterie of supporters. You stand almost alone".[166] Nicoll was also struck by the hostility of "the McKenna-Runciman faction who forgather[ed] in the Reform Club". The editor's dislike of Runciman far outreached his anger at Lloyd George and nudged him to reconsider his antagonism towards his old champion. No doubt Nicoll was also aware of the increased opportunity

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[163] 9th June 1917, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62979, ff.101-2.

[164] British Weekly, 28th June 1917.

[165] 19th July 1917, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.192.

[166] 21st October 1917, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.202.

for influence if the Free Churches joined the ever decreasing band of Lloyd George supporters. Agreement over the control of liquor traffic presented itself as a possible means of Lloyd George showing his good faith. Nicoll remarked to Riddell upon the desirability of the reunion of Lloyd George with Dissenters which could be facilitated by the dropping of State Purchase. On hearing this the Prime Minister "avowed that he was now paying no attention to [State Purchase], as he had other things to attend to..."[167]

Nicoll's reading of Lloyd George's political situation was reaffirmed in other correspondence. To Canon Deane he wrote:

> I have moved down to the Reform Club since the year began and have had a dreadful time. Many of the important politicians are there, and are very communicative. They belong exclusively, so far as I can find, either to the Asquithians or the Pacifists. What unites them is a common hatred of Lloyd George, which is simply maniacal and for which it is not easy to account, especially when taken with the fact that his friends are very lukewarm.[168]

In April he wrote to Lathbury of his alarm about Lloyd George, "Everybody is bashing his head, regardless of the fact that they have no substitute for him...I have moved to the Reform Club...The air is filled with hatred".[169]

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[167] 27th January 1918, McEwen, Riddell Diaries, p.214.

[168] Nicoll to Deane, 23rd February 1918, in Darlow, op.cit., p.271.

[169] Nicoll to Lathbury, April 1918, Darlow, op.cit., p.272.

Nicoll's reassociation with Lloyd George was facilitated by the recognition, at the beginning of March, that State Purchase was no longer being considered by the Government. The British Weekly revealed the news with "solemn thankfulness" and admitted that "few controversies we have ever engaged in have cost us so much pain".[170] In the same month Nicoll told a correspondent that the Prime Minister had sent for him and told him that "State Purchase was dead".[171] Lloyd George asked Riddell's advice regarding an invitation to speak at a Free Church meeting. Riddell was strongly in favour: "The Dissenters are your strongest supporters. Some of them suspect you just now. If you were to speak at this meeting it would revive the old alliance". It was resolved that Nicoll's advice should be sought.[172] The rehabilitation of the Prime Minister's reputation had already begun through Nicoll's private and public efforts. Norman Maclean, from St.Cuthbert's Parish Church in Edinburgh wrote to express his deepest gratitude at Nicoll's tireless battle for prohibition:

> I must confess I was getting sadly depressed about Lloyd George. I was terrified that he would go the way of all the rest. But your leader has reassured one. He [will] go on to deliver the nation from its greatest curse - that is what I gather from you.[173]

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[170] British Weekly, 14th March 1918.

[171] Nicoll to Guthrie, 26th March 1918, Darlow, op.cit., p.272.

[172] 2nd March 1918, Riddell Diaries, B.L., Add MS.62981, ff.63-4.

[173] Maclean to Nicoll, 11th March 1918, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

Nicoll was left to rebuild his association with Lloyd George even though it was now clear the Prime Minister did not hold Free Church issues as paramount. Nicoll's political options were limited by the fact that Lloyd George's Conservative enemies were even more hostile to Nonconformist demands. Therefore the British Weekly continued to champion the Prime Minister and provided a means for Lloyd George to turn to his Free Church constituency whenever he felt politically isolated.

Nicoll was with Lloyd George when the Prime Minister received the news in September 1918 that Bulgaria had submitted, leading him to anticipate the submission of Austria and Turkey.[174] The war ended less than six weeks later and the British Weekly trumpeted the "end of the mighty and evil system which Germany [had] built up with blood and tears".[175]

ii. Conclusion:

The conviction during the war that the Government should use all means in its power to ensure victory allowed Nicoll to strip the layers of his Radical past; accepting the need for conscription and cooperating with Northcliffe. He was now heavily implicated in the shift to the right of

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[174] Nicoll to James Moffatt, 29th October 1918, Darlow, op.cit., p.277.

[175] British Weekly, 14th November 1918.

the whole Lloyd George camp.[176] Gardiner's open letter in 1916 warned Lloyd George:

> Your friends have been silent long...They have refused to see your figure flitting about behind the scenes, touching the strings, prompting the actors, directing the game, and have agreed to talk of Lord Northcliffe, Sir Henry Dalziel, and the Reverend Dr Sir William Robertson Nicoll when the name that has been on their minds has been the name of David Lloyd George.[177]

Where there was disharmony between Lloyd George and Nicoll, it occurred because the editor remained in closer touch with his Free Church constituency. He knew that they would be outraged by Lloyd George's scheme for State Purchase - as was Nicoll - while the M.P. was more sensitive to the opposition of the working class to prohibition. Pressure from readers and Free Church friends pushed Nicoll towards extreme reactions and as always

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[176] In September 1915 Nicoll had further proved his value to Lloyd George by being instrumental in seeing off a vendetta by Henry Le Bas. Robert Donald sent Nicoll's biographer the following letter of explanation: "The letters which you send refer to a threatened action by Le Bas against Lloyd George, which would have been a very awkward thing during the War.

"L.G. had, before the War, threatened an injunction in connection with his life which Le Bas' company had published. Le Bas alleged that L.G. had accepted £1,000 to stop an injunction, and that his share of the payment, £500, had been obtained from him by false pretences. He wanted his money back. Riddell who had paid L.G. the other £500 paid Le Bas. The case developed into a matter of political and personal spite and has no public interest whatsoever, so you need not refer to it." Donald to Darlow, 30th January 1925, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

Nicoll received extreme gratitude for his part in the affair - which has not been recorded - from Stuart Paton and Donald, Paton to Nicoll, 15th September 1915, Donald to Nicoll, 14th September 1915, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden.

[177] Daily News, 22nd April 1916, in Koss, S., Fleet Street Radical, p.189.

removed some of his room for manoeuvre. Nevertheless throughout the period that Nicoll was battling over the drink traffic he accepted the value of Lloyd George's leadership. He wrote to James Moffatt in March 1917, "There is not the slightest doubt that L.G. had put a great deal more energy into everything, and that we are in a much better position than we were a year ago".[178] But through this process the nature of British Liberalism had changed utterly.

The process of reconstructing the Free Churches post-bellum was equally difficult. In 1915 Nicoll remonstrated with Dr. J.D. Jones that Nonconformity needed to be told very plainly that its place in English life would be lost if it failed to play its part in the war[179] but the ability of liberalism and religion to survive the war would only be known after a period of reconstruction. Griffith-Jones had warned that if Christianity could not be restated so as to meet the fundamental conditions of the new time "the only prospect for the future of civilisation is to face the Universe *minus* any religion at all".[180] But what leaders like Griffith-Jones and Nicoll advocated was a spiritual innocence which was not possible after the war. Moreover the British Weekly had abandoned itself to militarism despite Riddell's warning that religious newspapers should not accentuate the asperities of the war. These journals

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[178] Nicoll to Moffatt, 31st March 1917, Darlow, op.cit., p.261.

[179] Nicoll to Jones, 22nd October 1915, Darlow, op.cit., p.251.

[180] Griffith-Jones, The Challenge of Christianity, p.219.

could not pretend to transcend the violence in its aftermath. At the beginning of the war Denney judged:

> The war presents to every creature whose country is involved in it the one great moral issue of our time; and for a man to say he can do *nothing* in it is to vote himself out of the moral world.[181]

However when some people judged how the Churches had responded to the one great moral issue of the time it appeared that Christian leaders were not beyond reproach. In July 1916 the British Weekly approached the question of conscientious objectors. It accepted that the individual had the right - which had been exercised by saints and martyrs - to disobey the law when it conflicted with his conscience. However in the specific case of military service the British Weekly argued that allowing men to opt out on the grounds of conscience was "asking the law to annul itself" because it would leave the nation with nothing but voluntary recruits. The newspaper further suggested that even those "who place the authority of conscience highest must admit that it is not infallible".[182] This type of argument did irreparable damage to the position of religious leaders because it put the needs of the State above the individual conscience and contradicted the tradition of the Free Churches. The British Weekly had been hopelessly compromised by the war and as a consequence it lost the moral weight it had achieved in British life.

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[181] This was recalled in the British Weekly, 2nd November 1922.

[182] British Weekly, 13th July 1916.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COALITION LIBERALISM

Nicoll was sixty-seven when the war ended. In 1921 he wrote to Sir John Clarke, "I feel that we are both of us victims of the War. I know I have been on the edge of a severe breakdown. I go on with my work, but at my age it is a strain".[1] From the armistice until his death in 1923 Nicoll's contributions to the British Weekly steadily decreased. Darlow records that Nicoll virtually retired after his seventieth birthday in September 1921.[2] Extant correspondence from Jane Stoddart suggests that at least a year before this Nicoll was an absentee editor. He contributed some articles but the majority of the newspaper was now being written by his staff.[3] Nicoll's signed column "Things in General" which replaced "War Notes" became increasingly a space for political and literary reminiscences rather than topical debate.

The content of leader articles also changed as Nicoll's grip lessened; they dealt overwhelmingly with religious rather than political issues. This was symptomatic of the position of the Free Churches in the post-War period. The internecine battle in the Liberal party exacerbated the existing trend in Nonconformist groups to move away from political partisanship.

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[1] Nicoll to John Clark, June 1921, in Darlow, op.cit., p.300.

[2] Darlow, op.cit., p.429.

[3] Stoddart to Nicoll, 28th November 1920, 28th February 1921, 24th July 1921, 28th August 1921, 3rd September 1921, 7th October 1921, 12th November 1921, Nicoll Papers, Lumsden. This would further suggest that Stoddart's claim that Nicoll never wrote less than 41 leaders was a reference to his work preceding this period of nominal editorship. (Stoddart, William Robertson Nicoll, p.41.

Uncritical support for the First World War had discredited a very close association between religion and politics and drew further doubt over the Church's ability to provide society with a guiding moral light.[4] The extension of the franchise to greater numbers of the unbelieving working class also lessened the political influence of Free Church leaders. Chapel was no longer seen to be the premier social signifier and the very real diversity of Nonconformity was reflected in its voting patterns. The paralysing of the Liberal party by the Coalition made this appear less remarkable.

This chapter looks briefly at those political issues which ran through the life of the British Weekly until Nicoll's death, pulling together certain themes: the development of Lloyd George Liberalism, low-spending government and social reform, the Labour party, Socialism and Home Rule for Ireland.

i. Accepting a Conservative Coalition:

The British Weekly and the Baptist Times were the only two Nonconformist newspapers to give strong support to the post-War Coalition.[5] In May 1918 Nicoll had joined the cause of the newly formed Coalitionist Liberal Group and in November he attended a mass meeting of Liberal M.P.s and activists which passed a motion endorsing the Coalition

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[4] P.Catterall, "Morality and Politics: The Free Churches and the Labour Party between the Wars" Historical Journal, 36,3 (1993) p.680.

[5] Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.153.

manifesto.[6] Nicoll wrote to a friend at the beginning of 1919, "somehow the experience of the War has given me a great assurance of the general sense, stability and loyalty of the nation,"[7] and the Coalition appeared to represent to him a practical manifestation of national unity. Nevertheless the Coupon Election was problematical. It had not been successful for Nonconformists, only one third having carried Lloyd George's endorsement.[8] The Christian World saw in the election the "truth" that Lloyd George had been "completely captured and we had better recognise the fact at once".[9] J.D.Jones wrote to Nicoll concerned by the "wholesale proscription of Independent Liberals," adding:

> Frankly, I have no faith in the reforming zeal of a Government which has so preponderating a Tory element...My suspicions are confirmed when I read that the Welsh Church Act is to be amended & Protection is to be introduced...The P.M. could have squared the Reactionaries & swept the country without this miserable "coupon" business & he himself would have been a free man.[10]

Nicoll did share some of these concerns but political/ religious issues were not given great prominence in the post-war British Weekly. The Welsh Church Act was given little coverage and there was a very muted announcement

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[6] K.O.Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918-22, Oxford 1986, p.28, p.36.

[7] Darlow, op.cit., p.284.

[8] Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.152.

[9] Christian World, 7th November 1918, in Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, p.145.

[10] Jones to Nicoll, 6th December 1918, Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, pp.153-4.

that Welsh Disestablishment had been achieved on 31st March 1920. This was remarkable given the long years Nicoll had battled for this cause. The British Weekly simply said that the "spirit in which the Welsh Church [had] been disestablished, and the language held by the new Archbishops [were] full of good promise".[11] It was not until Asquith's re-election to Parliament in 1920 that the British Weekly admitted its unease about the Coupon Election, noting the danger of a weak opposition. Even then it claimed that support for the Coalition was necessary because the country was not ready for the revival of party politics.[12]

Nicoll justified supporting the Coalition Government because he saw in its election a victory for Lloyd George - who embodied non-Socialist reconstruction - not the Conservative party. The British Weekly noted that the salient points of the Coupon Election were the triumphant return of Lloyd George and his colleagues; the defeat of Asquith and his following; the routing of the pacifists and the brilliant result for patriotic Labour.[13] It appeared to believe that Lloyd George's strength in the country would enable him to pressurise his Coalition cohorts into accepting his agenda:

> We hope no one is foolish enough to suppose that the results of the election are a vote for Conservatism. Conservatism was probably never so weak in the country as it is now. A generous,

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[11] British Weekly, 8th April 1920.

[12] British Weekly, 13th May 1920.

[13] British Weekly, 2nd January 1919.

> far-seeing, kindly Conservatism which will work with Mr. Lloyd George, which will substantially benefit working people, will continue to have an honoured place and a very competent portion of the good things to come.[14]

Nicoll supported the type of reform which would be a bridge between Conservatism, Liberalism and the more conservative elements within the Labour party and he had enough confidence in Lloyd George to believe that he could deliver a reconstructive programme. The British Weekly identified the two rocks ahead as land and liquor. It wanted to see "compulsory expropriation [of land] on pre-war terms, and nothing else or less will be satisfactory". It warned the Coalitionists of their certain fate if they succumbed to the landlords and the brewers.[15] The following month in his "War Notes" Nicoll wrote that the desire on both sides for Liberal reunion was unmistakable and that the opportunity might arise from bringing forward an amendment appointing a committee to investigate profiteering.[16] Yet at this stage Nicoll wanted to heal wounds rather than recreate the old party structure.

The British Weekly kept sustained pressure on the Government to deliver the social reconstruction which was necessary to sustain its credibility with Liberals and workers. Within the first months of the new administration it took the opportunity of a by-election defeat in Liverpool to remind the Government that what the electors

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[14] British Weekly, 2nd January 1919.

[15] British Weekly, 16th January 1919.

[16] British Weekly, 13th February 1919.

had wanted was great and decisive beneficial changes which would be introduced immediately: "in particular they desired strong measures of social reform. The Government, it is tolerably plain, failed to be ready". The British Weekly had no doubts that the problem was "whether a Tory majority can work with a Radical Prime Minister. In order to do so they must be prepared to submit with good grace to drastic legislation...All that we read about the acquisition of land is profoundly unsatisfactory".[17]

The British Weekly continued its interest in low-spending Government and this was manifest in its campaign for cutbacks in the huge bureaucracy which had developed around war and reconstruction. However it did distinguish between this type of expenditure and that which was to be spent on social reform. In September 1919 it accepted that much stricter governmental controls were necessary in Government Departments but warned of the danger of running the business from the counting-house. Accusations of extravagance were all transferred onto the running of the government and it was now seen to be essential to the welfare of the country that the head of spending in Departments should have direct access to a supreme authority "in the event of his being convinced of the necessity of spending over and above the budgeted figure"[18] in order to provide more flexibility for social reform. In his own column Nicoll called for an increased building of houses and supported the Daily Mail's view that wooden

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[17] British Weekly, 20th March 1919.

[18] British Weekly, 4th September 1919.

houses were the solution to the shortage.[19]

At the end of September the British Weekly addressed the fact that support for the Coalition was decreasing. It believed that the most important issue for the public was its disappointment that profiteering had been allowed to carry on to such an extent and that the economy had been allowed to linger. It argued that the public could see the future of the Government was ruled by men whose own fortunes were deeply implicated in any drastic measures that may be taken. The article also drew attention to the 2,267 increase in the staff of Government Departments since July 1918. The British Weekly concluded:

> Now if the Prime Minister will take these things in hand - profiteering and waste of money - he will not be successfully dislodged, but will obtain the confidence and gratitude of the people. But if the squandering of money is to go on practically unchecked, if the drink sellers are to have it all their own way about the sales of drink, if profiteering is but lightly diminished, the prospects of the Government are very dark - and dark for the best reasons.[20]

After Coalition by-election losses at the beginning of 1920 Lloyd George discussed three possible options with Riddell: retirement, resigning in order to organise the Coalition Liberals or fusion between the two wings of the Coalition to give the Government a more positive identity.[21] Lloyd George sought Nicoll's opinion on the political situation. The response provides the most

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[19] British Weekly, 27th November 1919.

[20] British Weekly, 25th September 1919.

[21] February 1920, Riddell, Peace Conference, pp.164-6.

comprehensive extant statement of Nicoll's private political opinion.

While the editor believed that Lloyd George's position in the country was never stronger he accepted that members of the Government (which Nicoll referred to as "our Government") were unpopular and that their inaction was severely criticised. Consistent with the line of the British Weekly Nicoll believed that profiteering and housing were the main causes of unpopularity and that Geddes and Churchill were liabilities. Regarding the possibility of Lloyd George retiring, Nicoll believed that it was out of the question as it would be interpreted as a triumph for Northcliffe and could never be justified given the immense majority commanded by the Prime Minister. Nor did Nicoll think Lloyd George should secede from the Coalition and form a Liberal party. He believed that the Wee Frees would come to very little if they were boldly faced, but in the meantime there would be a struggle on their part.

Nicoll concluded that Lloyd George should form a Democratic party to fight the foe of direct action: strikes of a murderous kind. In fighting these and insisting on all matters being settled in Parliament Lloyd George would have behind him Conservative, Liberals and a large portion of the Labour party. This would allow understanding with the Labour party on various points. The only loss would be that of some Tory extremists which would be bound to happen

under any circumstances.[22] This advice was followed by a piece in Nicoll's signed column in March. The editor drew attention to speculation about "new parties" and agreed that by-election defeats made it necessary for the Liberal Coalitionists to talk about organisation. Nicoll concluded that perhaps too "a few who have done lip homage to the Coalition leader will be compelled to make a final and definite choice of service".[23]

The following week the British Weekly led with an article on the "Prime Minister's Outlook". In it Lloyd George was again warned that his first duty was to show his independence and his Liberalism. The article argued that the Government was in danger because it appeared to be safeguarding the rich by every possible means and urged Lloyd George to "make it clear that he [was] not standing out as the champion of property and the opponent of progress". It concluded: "there is no future for Mr. Lloyd George as the alien leader of a selfish Toryism. We cannot do without him. He alone has the incommunicable fire".[24] Although much of the article made it very clear that the British Weekly was not in Lloyd George's pocket, it also helped the Prime Minister to outline for his Conservative Coalitionists the absolute minimum which even his most loyal supporters were prepared to accept.

The issue of Government expenditure was highlighted by

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[22] Nicoll to Lloyd George, 4th February 1920, L.G.P., F/43/7/15.

[23] British Weekly, 18th March 1920.

[24] British Weekly, 25th March 1920.

the success of an Anti-Waste candidate in the Dover by-election at the beginning of 1921. The British Weekly was "convinced" that if Lloyd George used his "unrivalled authority" and insisted in deeds not words in the spending Ministries, "the coming year may bring that relief from crushing taxation without which the trade of the country and the prosperity of its citizens cannot possibly revive".[25] By-election defeats to Labour in Clayton and North Camberwell a year later prompted Nicoll to write in his signed column that the "security of the Coalition [was] seriously threatened by alienation of public confidence". The editor warned that the electorate did not believe that the Government intended to carry out the reforms suggested in the Geddes Report (which had recommended a reduction of over £75,000,000 on present outgoings). Nicoll argued that if the Government did not take up the theme with passion, disappointed electors would resolve that "whatever Government they give their votes to, it will not be the present Coalition Government. This we take to be certain. The whole immediate future of politics depends on the handling of the problem of economy".[26] Again therefore Nicoll appeared to follow rather than lead general economic opinion.

Nicoll had followed Lloyd George towards the Right during the First World War and the British Weekly's support for the Coalition consolidated this position. Nevertheless loyalty was tempered by a great deal of criticism

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[25] British Weekly, 20th January 1921.

[26] British Weekly, 23rd February 1922.

concerning the inactivity of the Government and Nicoll's new association with vested interests was not an altogether comfortable one. The editor was however sustained by a belief in Lloyd George's ability to build a shelter for all earnest reformers for the duration of reconstruction.

The British Weekly drew a clear distinction between expenditure on social reform which was necessary to cement post-war society and the wasteful expenditure of bureaucracy. Nevertheless it did not have its own pro-active programme of reconstruction and merely responded to topical debate. Despite the British Weekly's self-image as a Radical newspaper it did not recognise the significance of Addison's resignation and this exposed its limited understanding of the real social reform issues.

ii. Accommodating Labour:

The Coalition has been depicted as an anti-Labour, anti-Socialist union although the Government did attempt to be flexible when dealing with Trade Unions in order to avert the need for military action.[27] The British Weekly largely maintained its pre-War line on the Labour Movement. It wanted to see cooperation between Liberal and Labour in order to offset the extreme Left; this was given heightened urgency by the impact of Bolshevism in Europe and more immediately by the militancy of British Trade Unions. This was consistent with the general aim of Lloyd George

[27] Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p.6, pp.55-56.

supporters in the Coalition.[28] The British Weekly accepted the link between poor social conditions and support for radical solutions. In March 1919 it reported evidence given of the living conditions of Scottish miners and asked "Can we wonder if Bolshevism breeds and broods in darkest Scotland?"[29]

However alongside a limited understanding of workers' discontent, the British Weekly was determined that vital industries should not be allowed to hold the country to ransom. In the face of the "Labour menace" it warned that if coal and transport were taken from the nation there was "no measure for the suffering that [would] result". The British Weekly argued that the country had awakened to the shame of the situation of miners and that capitalists were working hard to make amends. The apparent injustice of the situation was summed up in the lament, "We are being punished for the sins of our fathers even more than for our own".[30]

The strike called by the London Police in the summer of 1919 prompted the British Weekly to reiterate its old line, that workers should not strike unless absolutely necessary (and could only be successful with the backing of public opinion) and that it was the business of the employer to "search out and probe into causes of even minor discontent among his employees and to apply the remedy

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[28] Turner, op.cit., p.369.

[29] British Weekly, 20th March 1919.

[30] British Weekly, 27th March 1919.

before the dangerous feverish stage sets in".[31] The British Weekly suggested that the reason why workers were so restless was that they were not being given a proper explanation for the fact that despite their wages being twice their pre-War level they felt no better off.[32] The following week Lloyd George addressed the nation to explain that the world cost of the War had been £40,000 million and warned that time would be needed for the return of industry to peace conditions.[33]

The British Weekly wanted both Capital and Labour to accept that national unity was still essential to Britain's survival. It was not until the end of 1919 that Nicoll dropped his "War Notes" column. In September the British Weekly warned against the tendency in certain quarters "to struggle back into the ancient ruts, to imagine that a social scheme which is dead can be revived...Disaster must inevitably come of our failure to recognise that no such unworthy retrogression is possible". This was very much in line with the message of Lloyd George who described the sublime duty of all, "without thought or partisanship, to help in building up the new world, where labour shall have its just reward and indolence alone shall suffer want".[34] He told Riddell, "I shall not be for the 'haves' or the 'have-nots'. My policy is to endeavour to hold an even

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[31] British Weekly, 14th August 1919.

[32] British Weekly, 14th August 1919.

[33] British Weekly, 21st August 1919.

[34] British Weekly, 18th September 1919.

balance between the two".[35] But this was a very simplistic reading of post-War politics.[36]

The British Weekly continued to attempt to distinguish between militant Labour and moderate Labour leaders. During the short lived Railway strike of October 1919 the British Weekly argued that what was at stake was the "right of one essential service to throttle the life of the nation, to enforce its demands by starvation of men, women and children, to ruin the trade of the country..." The spectre of Bolshevism was raised as the alternative if Britain abandoned constitutional government.[37] The ending of the dispute, and the agreement of the Railway Unions not to strike again until after September 1920, prompted the British Weekly to argue that the strike had shown the good sense of the British people, their engrained respect for law and also that neutral Labour leaders had succeeded in their determination to make a bridge. It offered all credit to the leaders of the railway men.[38]

In the last weeks of 1919 Lloyd George delivered a speech at Manchester which included an attack on Socialism linking it to the maniac shriek of the Bolsheviks. He called on those who believed that society was essentially

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[35] 20th September 1919, Riddell, Peace Conference, p.128.

[36] Riddell had reminded Churchill that he and Lloyd George had to share the responsibility for the new order whether good or bad: "You have been busy for years past stirring up the people. Now they are stirred up and demanding the things you told them to demand". 22nd July 1919, Riddell, Peace Conference, p.105.

[37] British Weekly, 2nd October 1919.

[38] British Weekly, 9th October 1919.

working to meet those who thought it was essentially evil. The British Weekly's response revealed that it was not yet ready to adopt this tone. Although no campaigner for Socialism or indeed the Labour movement, the British Weekly held on to the view that the Left could be accommodated within the Lloyd George supra-party Coalition. It described the Prime Minister's attack as the most debatable part of Lloyd George's speech:

> It is, in our judgement, far too soon to declare unrelenting war against Labour. It is also an error to declare that Labour is unanimous. It is true that Mr. Henderson has declared that a Labour Government would begin by a capital levy, a demand for the restriction of war fortunes, and a steeply graded income tax. But these claims are not irreconcilably different from the aims of Liberalism. The prospect before the Premier seems to be that of a war between Liberals and Conservatives in union and the Labour party. It is possible to conceive of other alternatives.[39]

In the spring of the following year the British Weekly criticised Lloyd George's view that all Labourists were Communists and Socialists who must be fought to the death. It stated plainly its desire "to make our protest against this wholesale identification of Socialism with the last word of the extremists", and argued that there were many points of cardinal importance on which Socialists, Liberals and Conservatives agreed; chiefly the need to raise the

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[39] British Weekly, 11th December 1919. In this the British Weekly was going against the view of both Lloyd George and Riddell. The latter recorded: "R: 'The Labour party are making excellent progress. Gay, the Labour party candidate at Plymouth, increased his votes by several thousand. It is obvious that there are going to be two parties - a Democratic Party with a forward programme and a Labour Party.' L.G.: 'Yes, that is becoming quite obvious'. 2nd December 1919, Riddell, Peace Conference, p.148.

condition of the worker.[40]

The British Weekly therefore continued its traditional policy of lambasting militant Labour while trying to reach an understanding with its more moderate members to the end that the country needed "industrial peace, and the highest standard of output in every trade".[41] In August the formation of a Council of Action to organise a general strike if any British naval or military forces intervened against the Soviet Union was condemned by the British Weekly: "Threats of a general strike, mischievous at any time, are intolerable amidst a dangerous foreign crisis". In the same week renewed threats of a miners' strike appeared as "such an appalling calamity" that the Government was expected "to explore every avenue of possible settlement".[42]

The Coal strike was not circumvented and industrial action began in October 1920. The British Weekly responded with the Leader, "The Need for Sober Words". It agreed with the Government's main contention that it could not suffer one of the great necessities of life being in the hands of any section of the community: "If the miners were allowed to succeed in their claims, then the way is open for other trades, hardly of less importance, to do the same". Nevertheless the main message of the British Weekly was a call for conciliation:

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[40] British Weekly, 25th March 1920.

[41] British Weekly, 22nd January 1920.

[42] British Weekly, 19th August 1920.

> Let the peacemakers do their utmost...Let every proposal be explored. Let all this be done in a spirit of calmness and of charity. The miners did great things during the war. There is no reason to credit them with a double dose of original sin. If they are fairly and gently used, we may come sooner than we think to a settlement which will more than reward our hopes.[43]

The following year the British Weekly again returned to the question of industrial strife in an article by Jane Stoddart, "Need there be a Class War?" The assistant editor replied with a resounding "No". She presented three ways in which the Government could counter the "perilous doctrine of class warfare": by proving the falsity of syndicalism; counter-acting the plotters by showing the immense gains already won by labour thanks to Lloyd George and Asquith; and by fostering a new comradeship:

> The business of statesmen in the future will be to see that no descendant of the war-winners shall be compelled to bear on his shield the sad word *desdichado* - disinherited.[44]

In 1919 Stoddart had written a piece on the debt of Labour to the Churches which was an attempt to show that "organised Christianity [was] awake, as never before, to the just claims of Labour". She claimed that during the Railway strike of that year "not a word was spoken from...leading pulpits which could prejudice the cause of the men. The Church and the people have sealed a new

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[43] British Weekly, 21st October 1920.

[44] British Weekly, 14th April 1921.

alliance".[45] Stoddart was correct in noting this increased cooperation[46] and on many occasions the same could have been said of the position of her newspaper. But Stoddart and the British Weekly failed to recognise that implicit support was not enough for the Radicalised Labour of post-War Britain. Industrial relations involved coercion as well as mediation and the British Weekly's belief in the possibility of balanced arbitration was a luxury which those involved on both sides of disputes could not afford. In not coming out strongly in favour of Labour, the British Weekly effectively aligned itself with the *status quo* and the employers as did Lloyd George and the Coalition.

iii. Foreign Affairs:

Lloyd George lost what remained of his traditional Radical support more through his attitudes to Germany and Ireland than he did through his attitude to Labour. Clifford was so opposed to the Prime Minister's anti-German position and the nature of the General Election that he took the Chair of a Free Church demonstration in support of the Labour party in December 1918.[47] Indeed Lloyd George was criticised by Radicals and reactionaries during the Peace Conference of 1919. Much of the anger of the British press was a result of the secretive nature of the

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[45] British Weekly, 11th December 1919.

[46] Catterall, "Morality and Politics" pp.667-685.

[47] Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, pp.146-7.

negotiations.[48] However the British Weekly remained a steadfast supporter of the Prime Minister. This was no doubt in part due to the fact that George Riddell, as the official representative of the British press, corresponded with Nicoll throughout. Lloyd George had asked the British Weekly editor to join him in Paris but Nicoll declined, feeling too old for the task.[49] In April the British Weekly declared that the "country had not withdrawn its support from the great leader who won the war," and nor would it "easily pardon those who [sought] to discredit him in a faithful hour".[50]

The draft terms of the Treaty revealed the following month prompted A.G. Gardiner to write "If the Peace Terms are the last word we have to say to Germany...Let us bury the Covenant and prepare for war in whatever quarter it may break out".[51] In contrast the British Weekly decided that the Prime Minister had put the whole force of his own genius into the Treaty and that Europe would benefit from his "reconciling, healing efforts". It saw as the best hope for the future a democratic government in Germany which could become a member of the League of Nations and obtain some modification of the Peace terms.[52] Reporting the joy in Britain as Germany signed the Treaty, the

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[48] March 1919, Riddell, Peace Conference, p.41.

[49] Darlow, op.cit., pp.287-8. This was told to the author by Nicoll's daughter, Mildred Kirkcaldy.

[50] British Weekly, 17th April 1919.

[51] Koss, Political Press, p.799.

[52] British Weekly, 15th May 1919.

British Weekly saw the League as the most important element:

> A peace on paper, even though ratified by Germany, and enforced by sternest guarantees, will not satisfy the British democracy. The League of Nations must rule, or civilisation is destined to go down in unimaginable horrors.[53]

Nicoll's militaristic past allowed him to be more amenable to the severity of the Peace Terms than other Radicals. But the flow of communication from Riddell also helped to include Nicoll in the process and impressed upon him a sense of the narrowness of Lloyd George's room for manoeuvre and the difficulty of the task.

Lloyd George's other foreign policy preoccupation was Russia and it also proved divisive. Churchill's bellicose opposition to the post-Revolutionary regime was at odds with the general temper of the British nation and with the attitude of Lloyd George. In September 1919 the British Weekly criticised the uncertainty of the Government's policy asking how long Churchill was to be allowed to pour men and money into his campaign against the Bolshevists which could only succeed if Britain declared war on Russia. It believed that while Lenin and Trotsky had the peasantry behind them, "outside interference [was] doomed to failure".[54] In January the following year the British Weekly carried the Leader "War No More" which argued that Churchill did not understand the mind of the nation: "They

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[53] British Weekly, 3rd July 1919.

[54] British Weekly, 25th September 1919, 20th November 1919.

will not have war at any price. They are so wearied, so exhausted, so bereft, that hardly any cause would stir them to a renewal of the horrors that have been stamped indelibly on the minds of all..." It called finally for the removal of Churchill from the Cabinet, or at least the War Office.[55] The piece had an impact as Lloyd George told Riddell:

> While we were in Paris, Winston was very excited about Russia. I had to handle him firmly. He was most insistent, and prepared to sacrifice both men and money. Now he is changing his views on Russia. I think the leader in this week's *British Weekly*, which is able and bitter, helped to modify his ideas.[56]

The British Weekly did not stop haranguing Churchill whom it appeared had not significantly altered his position. Although it was opposed in principle to the Council of Action the British Weekly admitted that the "one excuse for the threat of violence...is the intense distrust felt by the working classes for Mr. Winston Churchill" who increasingly became a source of weakness to the Government. Churchill's suggestion that Britain should ally with Germany to fight Soviet Russia "was hateful to patriotic men of all parties".[57] The British Weekly was prepared to follow Lloyd George's approach to Germany and Russia (although censuring Churchill) which has been described as

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[55] British Weekly, 22nd January 1920.

[56] 24th January 1920, Riddell, Peace Conference, pp.162-3.

[57] British Weekly, 19th August 1920.

a preoccupation with appeasement.[58]

iv. Reprisals in Ireland:

The Government's policy in Ireland was not one of conciliation and required increasing military resources but the British Weekly gave its full support to the Prime Minister. Sinn Fein had set up the Irish Dail after their overwhelming victory in the 1918 General Election. This was not declared illegal until September 1919 and by then certain structures of the new Irish State were already in place.[59] This new political situation allowed the British Weekly to shift its support towards its Protestant brethren in the counties of the North East. In a signed piece Nicoll argued that the case for Protestant Ulster had to be restated: "It must now be admitted...that they [Ulster Protestants] are asked to do a much harder thing [than have an understanding with Redmond and the Nationalists]. They are asked to submit to the Sinn Feiners and to join in an independent Irish Republic. That they can never do".[60] The British Weekly accepted Lloyd George's refusal to constitute Ireland as a Republic and his argument that to do so would be to negate the whole purpose of the war by creating a country over whose harbours and inlets Britain had no control and which would jeopardise or ruin the

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[58] Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p.133.

[59] R.F.Foster, Modern Ireland 1600-1972, (paperback) London 1988, p.495.

[60] British Weekly, 17th July 1919.

Empire. Nevertheless it did not want to see the wholesale alienation of the Irish people by repeating the blunders that came after the 1916 Rebellion.[61]

Lloyd George was not sensitive to the lessons of the past in Ireland and while not conceding that the increasing violence constituted a "war" (and therefore having to rely on the police to enforce order) he did support a policy of unofficial reprisals by the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries sent in to help the police.[62] This brought on him condemnation from all sections including the I.L.P., the Northcliffe press and C.P.Scott who severed his friendship with Lloyd George as a consequence.[63] In contrast the British Weekly had no criticism of Government policy and in June 1920 argued:

> The gravity of the situation compels a truce to niggling criticism. If the voice of reconciliation is to be heard in Ireland we must abandon party bickerings among ourselves. It is almost incredible that in this fateful hour any writer of intelligence should blame the Prime Minister for the Irish troubles.[64]

In the summer an Irish Emergency Bill was placed on the Statute Book and the British Weekly dismissed criticism of its severity from Asquith: "Like Mr. Asquith we deeply deplore the necessity of exceptional measures of severity, and the overriding of the jury system, but we ask, would he, if in power, suffer a continuance of the hideous

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[61] British Weekly, 1st January 1920.

[62] Foster, Modern Ireland, pp.497-498.

[63] Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, p.125.

[64] British Weekly, 24th June 1920.

atrocities now prevalent in Ireland?"[65] In December the British Weekly put its support behind the introduction of Martial Law, declaring that the measure received the support of all moderates in Ireland and encouraged wholeheartedly every authority, organisation and individual who was prepared to work for peace.[66] Conversely coercion was more likely to have the effect of pushing young moderates towards violent opposition.[67]

In November 1920 a "court" consisting of prominent Americans had been set up to hear testimonies on the situation in Ireland. The Manchester Guardian discussed its findings in a leader at the end of March the following year:

> in the main the facts, unhappily, are only too far past dispute...A few men like Sir Hamar Greenwood [Secretary of State for Ireland] have landed us in the dock, without a defence, before the consciences of mankind.[68]

Undeterred Nicoll continued his support for Government policy. At the end of May 1921 he received the news that he was to be appointed a Member of the Order of Companions of Honour in the King's Birthday Honours List.[69] Hamar Greenwood wrote with congratulations and received a reply from Nicoll which he passed on to the Prime Minister.

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[65] British Weekly, 12th August 1920.

[66] British Weekly, 16th December 1920.

[67] Foster, Modern Ireland, p.498.

[68] Manchester Guardian, 31st March 1921, T.P.Coogan, De Valera: long fellow, long shadow, London 1993, p.184.

[69] Darlow, op.cit., p.302.

Nicoll wrote:

> Of all the kind messages I have received none has pleased me so much as yours. It was indeed wonderful that out of your kindness in midst of your overwhelming labours you found time to write me a letter of congratulation. I am most proud of the letter and most grateful to you. You do not need to be told that I am in full sympathy with you in your heavy task. You have shown yourself already to be both a brave and a wise man.[70]

In July 1921 a truce was declared in Ireland and Lloyd George offered a "Dominion Status" package which proved unacceptable to Dail Eireann and Sinn Fein. Before it had been rejected the British Weekly declared that no enemy of Britain would "ever again be able to accuse her of meanness or selfishness in her dealings with the sister island".[71] It remained optimistic even after the Dail's rejection.[72] The weight of public opinion and the prospect of having to rule 26 counties in Ireland indefinitely under Martial Law (6 counties in Ulster had already been conceded their own Parliament in a reworking of Carson's pre-War Provisional Government) forced Lloyd George to accept a Conference with the Irish leaders. For the British Weekly the Prime Minister had won the reward for his patient toil and invincible hopefulness.[73] The outcome of the Treaty negotiations were greeted with "profound thankfulness" by

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[70] Greenwood to Lloyd George, 9th June 1921, Nicoll to Greenwood, 8th June 1921, (copy) Lloyd George Papers, H.L.R.O., F/19/5/1, F/19/51.

[71] British Weekly, 18th August 1921.

[72] British Weekly, 1st September 1921.

[73] British Weekly, 6th October 1921.

the British Weekly which declared that the nation's thoughts went out with gratitude "to all who, under God, have had their share in the blessed work of reconciliation".[74]

The British Weekly was not uninterested in the future of Ireland and gave ample coverage to the main developments there. However it maintained its dispassionate approach to the politics of the island and colluded in Government oppression when other Liberal voices were raised in opposition. The Northcliffe press no doubt saw Ireland as another stick with which to beat Lloyd George but many Radicals were genuinely repelled by Government policy. The Treaty which Lloyd George negotiated in 1921 was resented by many Conservatives and would assist the Prime Minister's eventual passing. Therefore Nicoll's support was very important to Lloyd George and the editor undoubtedly felt the full weight of his responsibility. It was consistent with the British Weekly's position since its inception in which Ireland was not significant enough to dictate allegiance to the Liberal party. When Nicoll agreed with the party leadership on other major policy issues he accepted the official line on Ireland. This allowed him to accept Home Rule in 1886, the side-lining of Home Rule after 1894 and its re-introduction before and after the First World War. Ireland never impressed itself on Nicoll's conscience.

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[74] British Weekly, 8th December 1921.

v. The Collapse of the Coalition:

Unionist rebellion over the Irish Treaty aggravated the problems of the Coalition which had been endemic since its inception. Lloyd George was an over-mighty member of the Cabinet with no official party organisation. There would inevitably be a tussle over what the electorate had mandated: Conservatism or Lloyd George. The crisis was reached in July 1922 when Lloyd George was forced into accepting a Royal Commission to examine the process of granting Honours. Nicoll noted that there was "not much enthusiasm about the Birthday Honours, but there is satisfaction, and the new publicists who have been rewarded are men who have served the State".[75] There was very little coverage in the British Weekly concerning the dispute; however the Parliamentary correspondent did conclude that friends of the Government ridiculed "the idea of any person going, with the authority or knowledge of responsible Ministers, up and down the country selling honours for cash on delivery".[76]

The obvious fragmentation of the Coalition led Lloyd George to renegotiate his relationship with his pre-War constituency. In February 1922 he invited Free Church leaders to breakfast in Downing Street and the Westminster Gazette warned that there was "the lingering air of suspicion that the Prime Minister is turning to Nonconformity again in the hope of securing some political

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[75] British Weekly, 8th June 1922.

[76] British Weekly, 20th July 1922.

backing".[77] The British Weekly entertained no such reservations. During the summer Lloyd George joined leading Free Churchmen at a dinner hosted by Sir Murray Hyslop. Ernest Hodder-Williams wrote a sympathetic leader on the Prime Minister's theme "The Business of the Churches" and the British Weekly had invited a response from the Ministers present. Rev. Thomas Yates, Chairman of the Congregational Union, pre-empted criticism of the political nature of the evening:

> The attempt to represent it as a gathering of one political colour, or as an election move, became merely fatuous in view of the character both of the assembly and of the speeches. The host of the occasion is, I believe a whole-hearted supporter of the Coalition, though he said nothing even remotely suggesting it...It was as mixed a company politically as the Free Churches are mixed.

The British Weekly added its own view that Lloyd George had "cleverly disarmed all possible opposition or criticism by beginning his speech with the statement that he proposed to ignore politics and speak as a Free Churchman".[78] If the Chairman of the Congregational Union was politically naive the British Weekly certainly was not and this provided a striking example of the disingenuousness of its reporting of the Prime Minister.

The inevitability of a General Election which was anticipated in the autumn of 1922 had the effect of pushing the British Weekly towards a less tolerant view of the

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[77] Westminster Gazette, 25th February 1922, in Koss, Nonconformity in Politics, pp.159-160.

[78] British Weekly, 3rd August 1922.

Labour party. Although claiming to accept that it should be fairly represented in the House of Commons, the British Weekly claimed that everyone should understand that Labour's unofficial programme was something approaching the nationalisation of all important industries.[79] By October the British Weekly was arguing that the next Government must be a Coalition since no single party could command a decisive majority in the House of Commons and that the real enemy which must be fought was that extreme type of Revolutionary Socialism linked with Bolshevism in Russia. It reminded its readership that it was less than two years since the country had been threatened with "direct action" in the form of industrial strikes which would have paralysed the life of the community.[80] This was very much at odds with the British Weekly's former efforts to distinguish very clearly between the moderate Labour party and more extreme direct action. At the beginning of November in its Election leader "Into the Battle" the British Weekly suggested that there was very little difference in the proposals being put forward by rival groups, except for the Labour party with its militant Socialism which made it stand out from the other three principal groups.[81]

Lloyd George was forced from the Premiership by a vote at the Carlton Club in October 1922. The British Weekly wrote a restrained leader on "The Two Prime Ministers"

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[79] British Weekly, 10th August 1922.

[80] British Weekly, 19th October 1922.

[81] British Weekly, 2nd November 1922.

which listed Lloyd George's virtues and provided a tolerant profile of Bonar Law.[82] The following month the Conservatives won a clear majority in the General Election winning 347 seats. The collapse of the Liberal vote prompted the British Weekly to turn again to the idea of Liberal reunion; it claimed to have received many letters from both wings of the Liberal party in support of this view: "It is pleasant to have these assurances of a better day,...For ourselves we are convinced that the Liberal principles are again to have their day".[83] The temporary hostility towards the Labour party was abandoned and the British Weekly again attempted to explain that when Lloyd George talked about one "common foe" he was not talking about the party of Clynes and Henderson, but the dangerous section of the party which sought to overthrow the State.[84]

The theme which defined the politics of the first issues of the British Weekly had returned in the months before Nicoll's death: "The peril which threatens a divided Liberal Party is that of extinction". It still hoped for a Progressive alliance, accepting that there was "a growing alternative party which makes a strong appeal to bold reformers" but arguing that Lloyd George was as keen as any Labour leader for better housing or generous treatment of unemployed.[85] The British Weekly supported the Liberal's last gasp at the end of 1923 and carried a message from

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[82] British Weekly, 26th October 1922.

[83] British Weekly, 30th November 1922.

[84] British Weekly, 8th March 1923.

[85] British Weekly, 8th March 1923.

Asquith to his countrymen of the Free Churches which asserted that Liberalism was still following the path of sanity and peace, and opposing any encroachment upon freedom of trade, enterprise and opinion.[86] When the future of the Liberal party was sealed in January 1924 the British Weekly nevertheless heard in Ramsay McDonald's victory speech at the Albert Hall "scarcely a word with which any Liberal could disagree".[87] Stephen Koss has argued that the British Weekly's assertion the following October that it was "willing to give the idea of Liberalism a broad and inclusive interpretation"[88] was representative of the broader Liberal campaign in which "Liberalism had been elasticised to stretch in either direction".[89] Consequently, it had ceased to have an independent identity or the vibrancy necessary to survive the post-war political world.

vi. Conclusion:

The last years of Nicoll's life coincided with the palpable decline of political Nonconformity and the end of the power in journalism of nineteenth century "men of letters". These external forces had an effect on the British Weekly and the weakened health of its editor meant

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[86] British Weekly, 22nd November 1923.

[87] British Weekly, 10th January 1924.

[88] British Weekly, 16th October 1924.

[89] Koss, Political Press, p.879.

that it lacked energy and focus in the immediate post-War years. Free Church issues such as Fisher's Education proposals in 1920 and the possible reintroduction of State Purchase in 1919 brought from the British Weekly warning shots but there was no attempt to revitalise political Nonconformity by developing agitation on these themes.[90]

The religious content of the British Weekly became increasingly removed from the political sphere. Jane Stoddart wrote a series of articles against Spiritualism which were eventually turned into a book.[91] These were an attempt to counteract the tidal wave of Spiritualism which had gathered during the war and after, predominantly among the bereaved. The British Weekly, in its review of Stoddart's book, urged Churches to propagate a message "calling their people to trust and to wait for the reunion with the longed-for and the lost".[92] The orthodox Christian Churches had to battle to sustain their position in a time when realism had replaced romanticism and belief systems had been severely tested by the War. Therefore many concentrated on defending their theological message and protected themselves from the further criticism of being too closely associated with political parties. The great Nonconformist battles were a thing of the past and Nicoll had never taken on a fight unless he was sure of his

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[90] At the end of 1919 Nicoll noted that there were rumours of the revival of State Purchase. He concluded that the danger was not imminent but the situation needed watching. British Weekly, 20th November 1919.

[91] J.T.Stoddart, The Case Against Spiritualism, London 1919.

[92] British Weekly, 20th November 1919.

side.

Nicoll's relationship with Lloyd George was central to the the political nature of the British Weekly after the War. The Prime Minister was strong in the country but had lost much of the fabric of his organised support. The fragmentation of the Nonconformist political voice robbed him of his natural constituency and his collusion with the Conservatives had left him bereft of his former Radical supporters. The acquisition of the Daily Chronicle and the setting up of the Lloyd George Liberal Magazine also signalled the Prime Minister's declining relationship with other members of the Press. In this environment the continued support of the British Weekly had even greater significance and this intensified the relationship between the newspaper and Lloyd George.

The British Weekly understood the need to make room for Labour and the period of reconstruction saw Nicoll give unprecedented attention to the broader issue of social reform (although as always his newspaper was short on specific policy initiatives). It was on domestic affairs that the British Weekly was most critical of Lloyd George, aware of the danger should he be seen as a puppet of the Conservatives. It differed with the Prime Minister most strongly on the alienation of moderate Labour, the British Weekly having believed that the Coalition's task was truly to create a large Progressive Centre to stand against the extreme Left and Right. Nicoll saw the period very much as an extension of the War emergency and fought against the revival of party politics. This helped him to avoid

recognising that he too had shifted from his former Radical base. However the War had polarised politics in Britain and Nicoll's hope of national unity did not survive beyond 1921.

Nicoll's death in May 1923 removed the final illusion of political strength from Nonconformists. His successor Rev. J. M. E. Ross lacked Nicoll's political acumen and Jane Stoddart lacked his political contacts. The confusion within the Liberal party was reflected in the British Weekly and it disappeared from political significance under its new leadership.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been an examination of British Nonconformity as it was represented by Nicoll and the British Weekly from 1886 to 1923. It traces the development of Nicoll's political character - his relationship with the Liberal party and the expanding democracy during this period. It has also explored the way in which the weekly print medium through which he worked shaped Nicoll's responses. This thesis has been interested in the interplay between religion and politics in the finale of political Nonconformist strength.

This work set out to prove that the British Weekly was a journal with a very specific political and sectarian agenda. Despite Nicoll's protestations to the contrary the British Weekly was created to capture the Liberal Free Church readership lost to the Christian World when it turned Liberal Unionist. Nicoll wanted to invigorate the Radical Nonconformist presence within the Liberal party and strengthen the party's commitment to the campaign for religious equality. The British Weekly did not represent the special relationship between Gladstone and the Free Churches and within two years of the Home Rule split it was vilifying the Liberal leader for his lack of commitment to disestablishment. The Irish question did not constitute the pressing moral issue which kept Nicoll alongside the official Liberal party; this was religious equality.

The urgency with which the British Weekly pressed the campaign for disestablishment was a recognition of two factors: firstly that many Nonconformist grievances had already been removed (such as compulsory Church rates and

religious tests at Oxford and Cambridge), reducing the sense of alienation of the Free Churches and their politicisation which in turn reduced support for disestablishment. Secondly, that the extension of the franchise to a wider, less religious working class necessarily reduced the political influence of the Free Churches and altered the nature of political debate. The British Weekly attempted to link the new language of democracy to that of disestablishment but religious equality was not immediately relevant to the majority of working class voters.

The realization that electoral reform had transformed politics forced the British Weekly to partake of the social reform debate. This analysis shows that Nicoll's main motivation in this area was to present the Liberal party as having the ability and commitment to accommodate the Labour movement within its programme. The British Weekly carried many articles on Socialism which it attempted to prove could be encompassed within the broad progressive force already existing in the Liberal party. Rosebery appeared as a possible leader of this reforming church and the British Weekly supported the direction he was thought to give in Gladstone's wake.

This thesis shows, however, that Nicoll's association with the Liberal Imperialists was more the consequence of other factors. Rosebery represented a move away from the dominance of Home Rule and his close association with Robert Perks suggested that he would incorporate the Free Church agenda within his progressive programme. The

Roseberyites also appealed to Nicoll's imperialist instincts which saw him support the British cause during the Boer war and later, high Naval Estimates.

When the Liberals achieved power in 1906 the British Weekly could support their reforming programme because much of it was prescriptive and because the burden of payment was not to fall on to the middle classes. However Nicoll also supported Lloyd George because he had a reputation as a Free Church M.P. who campaigned against the 1902 Education Act and fought for Welsh Disestablishment. Lloyd George's past as a "Pro-Boer" was not prohibitive to a working relationship with the British Weekly editor because sectarian concerns were more important to Nicoll than imperial issues. Nicoll was prepared to sacrifice some of his independence in order to move into Lloyd George's inner circle because he felt it was important that Free Church leaders should have the ear of a senior Minister. It had been a source of anger that Gladstone never had a Nonconformist as a close friend. The Free Churches finally had someone in a position of power who was truly responsive to their particular demands. Unlike Rosebery, Lloyd George understood very well the language and tradition of Dissent and this was an important conquest for Nicoll. His wrath during the First World War revealed the extent to which Nicoll expected Lloyd George to bow to his Free Church past. Records of Nicoll's contact with Lloyd George reveal that the editor was still pressing sectarian issues long after they had lost political immediacy. However this thesis also shows that Nicoll was rather dazzled by his

association with Lloyd George and was consequently compromised by this link.

As a newspaper the British Weekly was one of the main formulators of the idea of the "Nonconformist Conscience". Price Hughes first used the term in 1890 during the Parnell scandal. At this time and during resistance to the 1902 Education Act the "Nonconformist Conscience" was used to describe the assertiveness of political Nonconformity; the term does not refer to individual conscience but to a collective voice. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Free Churches had begun to look to the State to legislate for morality. Therefore the shared conscience was necessarily political. It was used by journals like the British Weekly to raise the collective consciousness of Dissenters in an attempt to impress their moral value system on the national mind.

This work also demonstrates how the newspaper medium affected the way in which the British Weekly expressed this Free Church conscience. Nicoll dictated his contributions to a secretary and they read like sermons which gathered emotion as they progressed. As a journalist he had to make his points clearly and concisely and this often simplified the debate. He was also hostage to these weekly diatribes. Equally Nicoll could not remain silent on important issues. He could omit certain pieces of news from his paper, and relegate information to the centre pages, but on major political and social issues the British Weekly had to put something on record. This certainly had a propulsive influence during the passive resistance movement and during

the campaign against State Purchase during the First World War.

The issues which dominated political debate changed from the moral crusades of the nineteenth century to the social and industrial campaigns of the twentieth century and the Free Churches could not find a united voice on modern issues. The implosion of the Liberal party also removed the only secure base of Nonconformist influence and exacerbated a trend in which Dissenters were drifting to the Left and Right. The position of some Free Church leaders during the First World war left them exposed to criticism when the war ended. The British Weekly had been instrumental in keeping the shared consciousness of the Free Churches alive and refreshing the cultural memory of its readers long after Nonconformity ceased to be a powerful political force. In the post-war reconstruction the link between religion and politics was further severed and the Liberal party was in irreversible decline. Furthermore the deaths of Nicoll and Clifford in 1923 dealt a severe blow to the collective strength of Nonconformity, representing the end of an era.

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